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OUR OWN POMPEII

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A ROMANCE OF TO-MORROW

“ Là du plaisant Avril la saisin immortelle
Sans eschange le suit,
La terre sans labeur, de sa grasse mamelle
Toute chose y produit,
D'enbas la troupe sainte autrefois amoureuse,
Nous honorant sur tous,
Viendra nous saluer, s'estimant bien-heureuse
De s'accointer de nous.”

—PIERRE DE RONSARD.

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS

EDINBURGH AND LONDON

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OUR OWN POMPEII.

CHAPTER XII.

MRS DENBIGH had watched the friendship (or "flirtation," as she preferred to call it) which was growing up between Miss van Knut and Darlington, at first with annoyance, and then with a well-founded dread. She had long expected, as we have before said, that in the course of time and of nature Darlington would become attached to her own daughter. They had known one another from childhood; they had always been fast friends. What could be more suitable, from all points of view,—from that of heaven where marriages are made, down to that of the 'Morning Post' in which they are recorded; what could be more for their

real welfare and happiness, than that this friendship should lose itself in a deeper and more passionate attachment? And now Mrs Denbigh felt that all might be changed by the intrusion of this extremely unpleasant and pushing American girl. Poor unsuspecting Darlington had been captured and carried off to the enemy's fortress. And while he was lying there bound and helpless, he might be forced to fatally commit himself—perhaps to allow himself to be carried off to America in triumph. Patriotic motives vied with maternal instincts (at least as far as it is possible that they could do so) in urging Mrs Denbigh to summon the victim's mother to the rescue. She had written a long letter to Lady Downstreamdown, impressing her with the urgency of the case. And that lady had replied that she was both pained and alarmed at the truly distressing news; and that in order to prevent such a degrading calamity, she herself would start for Pompeii at once. In the meantime, she was sure that she could rely on Mrs Denbigh acting a mother's part to her poor, deluded, defenceless boy. She had also probably written to Darlington, Mrs Denbigh thought; but if this was the case, it ap-

peared to make no difference in his conduct, and she saw that all her wits would be required to keep him from destruction until the Countess arrived.

Nor indeed was Darlington's conduct the only cause she had for anxiety. Troubles in this life never seem to come singly; and here was Claud complicating matters by wanting to marry Claudia. She considered the young man's prospects from all points of view, and from none of them did these prospects appear particularly satisfactory. He had only his uncle's allowance—an allowance depending on a goodwill which lately had been becoming somewhat scanty, she suspected. And even if this were continued, it would be of course of too slender a nature to support her daughter (in such a way as she had a right to expect) as well as her daughter's husband. Was Claudia at all in love with Claud? Mrs Denbigh kept asking herself. She thought not; and yet she was still extremely annoyed and uneasy about what she called "Claud's inexcusable conduct" on the night of the ball. If he had said nothing to her daughter, it might all have been so conveniently arranged — she meant, that Claud's

dismissal and the extinction of the affair might have been so conveniently arranged; while now, in the present state of things, if Claudia had any feeling in that direction,—if there were any gentle stirrings in her heart which might herald a dawn of love,—Mrs Denbigh was not sure that that heart was sufficiently disciplined, was sufficiently awake to repressions demanded by social position, to instantly cease at a word of command from tender reciprocation. In short, she doubted Claudia's docility. She knew that she chafed under the autocratic commands of social observance. She even had a horrid fear that if she were to tell her daughter that the man whom she loved had not a penny, it would not necessarily instantly extinguish that affection at once and for ever. A girl who was so strange as Claudia appeared to be—who preferred hunting to society, the country to the London season—might, if she fell in love, absolutely prefer that love to money. Such was the summary of Mrs Denbigh's constant thoughts. And this was her state of mind when she received a note from Lord St Kevan in response to one of her own. It ran as follows:—

“DEAR MADAM,—In reply to your letter, I need hardly assure you how pleased I should be if my nephew were able to form an alliance with the young lady you have indicated, or add my hopes that his future career, which is entirely in his own hands, will be a brilliant one.—I am, yours truly,

“ST KEVAN.”

This brief, careful, and diplomatic note was not what Mrs Denbigh had “bargained for,” as one may say. She felt that it was not sufficiently *intime*, not sufficiently confidential; and being instinctively enterprising, she sought and obtained an interview with Lord St Kevan.

He was extremely polished, extremely courteous, but also extremely reticent. She, however, gathered that at one time he had intended to leave a large part of his private fortune to Claud; that recent circumstances had shaken that resolution; and before she had finished her visit, she had even ascertained to a certain extent what these circumstances were.

The author fears that Mrs Denbigh has so far been represented in the odious light of a mercenary

and intriguing woman. And yet she was no worse than most careful mothers are, when the maternal instinct (that most transforming force of nature) has been excited. Does not the most ordinary of mothers acquire new powers, fresh perceptions, and strange intuitions, to assist her in making inquiries and obtaining the truth about the prospects, position, and income of aspirants for her daughter's hand? If she cannot go straight to the fountain-head, what subtle investigations she sets on foot—what an immense amount of tact, both acute and defensive, she generates in order to ascertain any and every thing that may assist her decision! And therefore, if justice is not done to Mrs Denbigh, we must remember that all that has been emphasised here is either ignored, unknown, or forgotten about other mothers, although it exists in various forms, and that it is chiefly the worst side of poor Mrs Denbigh's character which so far has presented itself in connection with this story.

“It cannot be,” she said to herself with maternal decision; and we may be sure that this meant that it was not to be, as well.

There was a pretty street in Pompeii, lined on either side with small shops, mostly for *bonbons*, *bric-a-brac*, flowers, newspapers, books, and such other small articles as may be supposed to furnish the daily wants of a pleasure-seeking community. Bright awnings slid down from above them when the inroads of sunshine were too persistent; and the shadows thus cast helped to form a delightfully cool retreat for a morning stroll. Mrs Denbigh, the morning after the picnic, was enjoying the pleasures of shopping, and, allured by the tempting shade, she was lingering even a little longer than usual, when she found herself brought to a stand-still by Claud, and then found herself granting an interview to him immediately.

Now that she was firmly determined that "no" was to be the word, she was anxious that it should be said as gently as possible. She suddenly felt a great kindness towards the young man. For, after all, was he not the nephew of a peer; an extremely charming young man in himself; and if he had only had the wherewithal, could any mother have desired a more presentable and satisfactory son-in-law? She thought she had been too hard on him in their

last interview. Now she would try and convince him—or what would be even better, show him how to convince himself—that his views were impossible; and then she would let him feel that although she shared in these views, yet she pitied him deeply, and sympathised with him in his great disappointment. So that it was in her kindest and sweetest manner that she assented to his request, and suggested that they should walk on the beach a little away from the noisy town.

He found her a comfortable seat, where some springing turf had asserted itself by the edge of the shore; and then, having thrown himself on the sand at her feet—an attitude chosen for comfort and not for supplication—he began, “You know what I want to say to you, Mrs Denbigh?” And she answered, with her eyes looking out to sea all the while, “Yes, I can guess.”

“I have spoken to my uncle,” he went on, “and he tells me that my future is in my own hands. I am sure, you know, he will use all his influence and do all that he can for me. And I shall work—oh, how I shall work, if I can feel that I am working for your daughter!” Claud’s eyes lit up

and his voice trembled a little with enthusiasm as he spoke.

“Mr Brownlow,” replied Mrs Denbigh—and her words came slowly, as though trimmed and measured for the effect to be produced—“I feel that the really kindest thing in the end will be to tell you the simple truth, even though it will give us both the pain of believing that this can never be.” Her tones were sympathetic, but her words, in addition to blasting his hopes with a stunning blow, seemed to have a tinge, a ring of insincerity about them; and he cried out “Never be!” in a voice which expressed everything but conviction.

“Claudia is delicate,” she went on, still marshalling the facts with a self-possession which bespoke preparation. “I am sure you are too generous to wish to provide her with a home where she would not get every comfort that she had been accustomed to.”

“Of course,” cried Claud, “she should—she shall—have everything that she can want.” For love is blind to ways and means. It is nobly generous in its schemes for the happiness of the beloved one. Its plans for the future are all golden, lit up with

its own reflected lustre. "And I can work," he went on, earnestly—"every man should work; and with *her* promise to encourage me, the hardest work would be the greatest pleasure."

"I do not approve of long engagements: how long such a one as you propose would last, perhaps you are the best judge. But I should fancy that ten years would be the shortest time you could look forward to; and the Bar is such an uncertain profession that it might be fifty." Mrs Denbigh's voice was becoming a little colder. She wished to be kind—very kind—to Claud. But she had made up her mind that the marriage was to be impossible; and she began to think that he was very hard to convince—by kindness.

He got up and stood confronting her. He instinctively felt that a struggle was coming; but he was determined not to yield without doing all in his power to win over, convince, or conquer this resolute mother. "I fear that it would take some time before I should be able to offer your daughter such a home as she has the right to expect. But though I do not wish in any way to seem to depend on my uncle, yet you force me to tell you that I am cer-

tain he will make me an allowance such as would provide us with a home. At the present moment he is under a misapprehension about me ; but when I have seen him, and have explained the mistake to him—as I am now in a position to do,”—he looked at her narrowly, but she did not seem to catch, or at any rate to apply his meaning,—“ he will again adopt me as—you must excuse me, but rather than lose your daughter I must mention that I am sure he will again acknowledge me as his heir.” Poor Claud stumbled and blushed. He felt humiliated in making a confession which, under any other circumstances, would have been in the worst possible taste. But he had been, as he considered, brutally driven into a corner ; and he would use, if necessary, the sternest and most tasteless truths to extricate himself therefrom.

“ I have seen Lord St Kevan,” said Mrs Denbigh, quietly.

Then for the first time an angry flush lit up Claud’s face, and he asked defiantly what Mrs Denbigh had learnt.

“ Lord St Kevan gave me to understand that a secret—a State secret—had been betrayed.”

"But not by me," cried Claud, with anger not flashing but swiftly concentrating in his face.

"No; but he told me that you had repeated the secret to a lady;" and then, with one glance, she added—"and that is often the same thing."

His anger flamed out in a thundering burst. It was a fatal mistake. "He did not tell you who the lady was. But will you say the same when *I* tell you that the lady was your own daughter?"

Mrs Denbigh also got up. They stood facing one another.

"And even if that is not proof enough," he went on, "I think I can convince you when I inform you that I have discovered who the real betrayer is"—she looked at him steadily, still unmoved—"if that information is not already superfluous."

"I do not understand you," she said, coldly. "You can inform your uncle who the real culprit is, and then he may forgive you."

"But you do not understand," burst in Claud, "that I want to shield the culprit. I do not wish, unless it is necessary, to mention the lady's name. It is you who are forcing me, by your refusal, to

take this step. You will not let me speak to your daughter unless a certain income is guaranteed, and this can be only assured by my explaining *everything* to my uncle; while if you would only consent to my suit, I am sure that all would come right in time."

Mrs Denbigh opened her parasol, as though it were a preparatory symptom of the termination of the interview. "I cannot allow this affair to go any further," she said, with a dignity which might have adorned a queen of tragedy, "unless everything has been explained to and arranged with Lord St Kevan. If you know the culprit's name, you had better utilise it in the explanation."

"Even if it is a lady's?"

"Certainly."

"And *you* give me this advice. Do you do so innocently, or do you do so knowing her name?"

"Mr Brownlow!" The tones of her voice had a warning ring, which seemed to say, "Beware! I can be very relentless when trifled with."

"I asked M. Courier if he had repeated the conversation in question to any one, and he replied that he had told one person—a lady."

Mrs Denbigh changed colour, as recollection, like an electric shock, flashed through her. She changed colour, but not with fear—rather it was with a feminine intensity of indignation (wholly illogical in its surmises and conclusions) at the insolence of daring to connect any such treachery with her. Passion lit in her eyes and flamed down over her burning cheeks. Her very skirts seemed to rustle and swell with outraged injury.

She walked away a step or two as though she would not condescend to speak again to Claud; and then apparently changing her mind, she stopped and turned her head sufficiently far for him to catch a glimpse of her profile.

“I do not know,” she said, “whether you can judge how deeply you have insulted me. You have threatened to accuse me of betraying a secret in order to buy my daughter’s hand with your silence.” Then she blazed round full upon him—“But you have mistaken me. You can tell what you like—to whom you please—but you shall never be her husband,” and she walked away.

Claud stood petrified. Then in a moment he recovered his senses sufficiently to say, “I will tell

no one. You are mistaken. I was not accusing; I was only explaining—defending myself.” The last words were almost shouted after Mrs Denbigh, for her footsteps neither faltered nor halted as she steadily marched on.

When her retreating form had diminished sufficiently to force on Claud the realisation that he was really alone, he fell on the sand and tried to recall the words he had spoken—to review them in order to judge if the fault were his.

He told himself that Mrs Denbigh was entirely to blame. She had misunderstood him. She had forced him to speak out in order to defend himself and make good his own position. He had not accused her. He had only mentioned M. Courier’s name, and she had blazed up in a moment. She must therefore, he said to himself, have been guilty. Yet her previous words seemed to imply an absolute ignorance as to what he was driving at—an absolute innocence when she understood his meaning. And so poor Claud tossed and turned on the sands, an outward demonstration of the tossings and turnings of his mind within.

The very day seemed to mock at him with its

brightness, shining as only a morning can shine when it is born from the marriage of Spring-time with the warm and endearing South. The breeze came softly over the sea, and just paused to ripple it into smiles as it passed on to woo the land. A happy sea-bird skimmed over the water, and vanished at times in rapid dives for food. A bare-legged, bare-armed young fisherman passed with a lounging grace which is given to many Italians—perhaps a heritage from ancestral Romans whose rich free-born blood may be even now beating along their veins. It all passed before Claud's eyes like a waking dream. He watched a little boat setting out from Pompeii—he even counted the strokes of the oar; but he did so mechanically, and his mind distracted itself from its thoughts by idly playing with each trivial passing event. For he knew that, whether his blundering or Mrs Denbigh's misinterpretation had produced their quarrel, it would be all the same to him. He would be punished. He would have to suffer.

At last he picked himself up, and walked slowly back, with a stern determination that not

a word of what had passed should escape his lips. In spite of appearances, he had acted so far, he believed, as a gentleman should, and for the future he would continue to do the same, come what might.

CHAPTER XIII.

UNDER Democracy every class interest, sooner or later, makes itself audible. If it is emphasised sufficiently to give trouble, it is inquired into. If it is still unsatisfied, and is still more tenaciously exacting, it is given in to, its demands (no matter what their nature) are legalised, and legislative enactments in its favour are passed until it is satisfied.

At this moment the criminal classes had become aware that their wants were neglected, their liberty curtailed (by acts of a more or less coercionary character), their interests unconsidered. And Radical experts having discovered this feeling to exist, proposed a plan to the Government which would tend not only to secure them justice and remove their disabilities, but also to secure their votes (which,

after all, was perhaps the most important consideration), and at the same time gratify the ruling Democracy.

This was the Judges Appointment Amendment Bill, by which all judges were to be elected every three years by universal suffrage, so that for the future the judges might not be placed in relations more or less uneasy with popular influences, and with what, in all probability, would be the dominating influence in the country. It was thought by the Democracy (and especially by the criminal classes) that the bench were not sufficiently "in touch" with public opinion; that the judges (relying on the irresponsibility of their position) adhered to an abstract form of justice which was too archaic, legal, and theoretical, and which therefore might, at any time, come into conflict with the boundless wishes and nobly impulsive action of members of the Democracy. It was felt (even by gentlemen in the position of Cabinet Ministers and newspaper editors—we presume, on behalf of their friends) that it would be extremely convenient if justice would make exceptions—would give an ear to the voice of the People when it proclaimed that a felony

was no felony, but the most righteous of mistakes—instead of, as at present, following the mere letter of the law, and taking no heed of the generous spirit in which it was broken.

In early communities the people interfered in affairs of justice as directly as in those of government. Towards the end of the Roman republic they forced justice to meet their wishes. “Let them do so again,” said their modern leaders. They agreed (unconsciously, it is presumed) with Montesquieu when he said, “There is no liberty if the judicial power be not separated from the legislative and the executive;” and so they said, “Let us join them.” When political economy came into conflict with the traitorous wishes of certain of the Queen’s subjects, it was so much the worse for political economy. And just as the Ministry had forced on it the choice of either being banished to Saturn, or of adapting itself to their designs, so it was felt that the time had now arrived when the same choice should be offered to the “Fair Rosamond” form of justice. In short, the mob said, “We make the laws, and intend to superintend their execution.”

But perhaps what convinced the Prime Minister

most that the bill was essential to the real happiness of the country, was (as experts informed him) that it would secure to himself not only the vote of the criminal classes themselves, but also the vote of all their friends, abettors, and sympathisers. Indeed he was further informed that if the bill were passed, this vote might be regarded as a steadily increasing quantity. Even a burglar's vote is not to be despised. The combined burglar vote would be an extremely valuable addition to any political party; and if it could only be properly organised, it might control the whole State. I was going to remind the reader that, from a voting point of view, a burglar is as important and desirable a man as a duke—when I remembered that he is really much more important and much more to be considered, because he has a vote while the duke has none.

Yet will it be believed that, in spite of all this, the bill was unpopular? Of course the Conservatives opposed it (for are they not capable of opposing *anything*?) Many of the Whigs even disliked it extremely. In vain they were told to follow their usual course of pocketing their dislikes in order

that their party should not be broken up. Most indeed wavered, but a few were resolute. Of course the ones in the House of Lords did not count, because they were told plainly that any opposition from them (as from the Lords in general) would be merely sounding a signal-call for the whole of their party to unite against them; that if they resisted, no Liberal would any longer doubt the expediency, nay, the absolute duty, of at once forcing the bill through their House; and that if they still resisted, the only result would be that they would have created a convenient pretext for the friends of good government and of freedom to abolish them altogether.

Lord St Kevan had already been several days in town. He hurried from one place to another. He was much at Brooks's. He met various other old and influential gentlemen. They shook their heads and spoke in whispers, which might be summarised by the oft-repeated phrase that "of course this will never do." They had secret conclaves at each other's houses. The reporters from the evening newspapers followed them about, and even interviewed their butlers. Should any surprise be felt at the

Cabinet's holding together, and its individual members agreeing to sink their scruples and fears in order to support the Prime Minister, it must be remembered that even if flagrant mismanagement had arrived at such a point that the Government were obviously ruining the country, there would still be found plenty of men (in both Houses) who would be but too ready to assist in the destruction, so long as they might be counted among the destroying leaders. For consider: on one side there is only your country's welfare; and on the other is the prestige, the honour, the income, the notoriety attached to such a position. There are elderly peers whose whole happiness in life is bound up in the one word *office*—not apparently mattering much under what or whom, so long as they can be in *the* Government. It is their one amusement, their great occupation. While in the House of Commons, it is thought by cynics that there may not be many who are swayed by any higher motives than those which will *pay* with their party and please their local caucus. But in politics it is, as we know, the unexpected which generally occurs. Now the Government had been

indulging in several little wars, or “military expeditions,” as it preferred that they should be called; for it was by the extreme virtue of its members, and the extreme peaceableness of its principles, that it had been able to secure the entire vote of the “world”; and the dissenting world dislikes wars, though apparently it does not mind “military expeditions,” when they are conducted by its own elect and particular ones.

It may indeed be contended that if these “military expeditions” had not been conducted by such a high-minded and peace-loving Government,—if, for instance, they had been proposed by a wicked, war-loving Tory Minister,—they would probably have been stigmatised as inhuman massacres of helpless and innocent natives rightly struggling for freedom and liberty—especially as the Government had continued to slaughter these natives by thousands for many weeks, with the only conceivable object of keeping itself in office. But though these equivocal military and parliamentary tactics might be called by several names, one stubborn and palpable fact remained which could not be lessened by sophistry or ignored by wilful

hypocrisy. And the fact was, that they had to be paid for.

The Government, which had always posed as the personification of prudent economy (it is a useful attitude for catching votes), now found itself bringing in one of the biggest Budgets on record. Some new taxes must be imposed; and it occurred to the Chancellor of the Exchequer that pipes might perhaps be taxed with advantage—not only the poor man's clay, but the rich man's meerschaum. The Chancellor thought so, but the House would not stand the idea for a moment. The country's interests did not matter—its honour might be tarnished, its name slighted, its prosperity ruined, its prestige destroyed, if only (our supposititious) Prime Minister willed it; but would the House stand its constituents' pipes being taxed to pay for this privilege? Never! The Government found itself defeated, and its astonished party found itself out of office, in spite even of the indignant protests which were almost screamed by the outraged and furiously incredulous Radicals. Then occurred a week of negotiations. A wild turmoil bubbled up of principles and in-

terests, of hopes and fears, of duties and desires. At least a dozen great houses were watched all day by numerous reporters. When any one entered or left any one of them, it was noted on the record; and if he were himself a leader of either party, he was duly followed and run to earth. One Cabinet Minister was pursued till he took refuge in the Hamam. Then his relentless persecutor felt that he had him safely bottled, and might wait till he was baking. So he gave him ten minutes to get himself stripped, before following on the trail. He caught his victim in the hottest room of all. There he submitted him to a fire of questions; and although the answers were not as adequate as might have been hoped for, they were capable of being enlarged and enriched sufficiently to warrant an extra special edition of the paper that evening. Lord St Kevan had interviews with the leaders of both parties. Now was the time, he felt, for his scheme of a Coalition Government to become a reality. Now was the time for all the friends of order and good government to rally round the banner of some great (Whig) peer. The coalition, of course, must be under the ægis of the Whigs,

and thus neutralise all the dangers and the subversive views of the Radical tail.

But, alas! Lord St Kevan forgot that we are now living in the days of Democracy, when party is put before patriotism, and politics have become a gigantic scramble for place, for power, and for the spoils of the conquest. That any of the "loot," as a prominent Radical called it, should go to the Tories, filled the enlightened and advanced Liberals with fury. Lord St Kevan was listened to, but he thought that the listeners were a little impatient; and for the first time in his life he felt himself almost snubbed by the leaders of his party. He shut himself up in his study. He wrote two long brilliant and convincingly statesmanlike letters to the 'Times.' They were honoured on two consecutive days with "leading" big type and two whole columns of the inside page of that majestic organ. And that was all. They might be—indeed they were—convincing; but they were not convenient, and so everything went on as before.

The Conservative leaders decided that, under the circumstances, they could not carry on the Govern-

ment; and a week after their defeat the Liberals were found to be back again in office, with a more Radical Cabinet than ever. Two or three of the junior members of the Government were supposed to have hired their uniforms at a theatrical *costumier's*; at least it was known that these people (extremely respectable and worthy in their own walk of life), who had had neither time nor money to spend on the cultivation of their own aspirates, could not have any to spare on the acquisition of such superfluities as these.

The old gentlemen at Brooks's, and even a large contingent of the more advanced Reform, looked down the list of Ministers, especially at the minor appointments, with a kind of scared horror. "Who are these men?" they asked one another. "Where do they come from; and what, in heaven's name, are they doing here?" One or two of them, it is true, had been vaguely heard of before, but only as obscure agitators or meddlesome provincial town-councillors. It was known they had somehow got into Parliament: "any one," the old gentlemen said, shaking their heads, "can get into Parliament nowadays. But how had they got into the Govern-

ment? The whole thing's quite impossible. Why, we don't even know them by sight." There they were, however, flaunting themselves, cuckoo-like, in the sacred nest. If this were not stopped, the analogy might go even further. The affair was too serious to be overlooked, and strong remonstrances must be made in the right quarter. It was as though these worthy gentlemen had gone home and found two or three of their own gardeners comfortably seated at the dinner-table. They were as outrageously shocked and scandalised as they would have been had they found the very Ministers in question seated there, looking quite at home, and enjoying themselves in the participation of the meal.

The excitement of the crisis spread even to the happy idlers by the tideless sea. Mr Giles, on the arrival of the first telegram, was up and off to England. And if the truth must be told, he was not sorry to leave Pompeii. It had never been quite congenial to his material spirit. He had gone there originally to stay with a north-country gentleman, who was very rich, and very anxious to represent some free and independent electors in Parliament. Mr Grimstone — for this was the

gentleman's name — had invited Giles out there, in order to talk the matter over. In exchange for a liberal subscription to "the cause," Giles had placed at his disposal one of the safest suburbs of a great north-country town. And Mr Grimstone, in his gratitude, had added to his subscription a promise that he would have no will or opinions of his own, but would vote entirely as Mr Giles (the mouthpiece of the Centralised Executive Committee of the Caucus) should command.

In this ingenious manner it is obvious all real representation can be entirely evaded, and a Prime Minister (if assisted by the machinery of his party) can make himself absolutely autocratic. And an absolutely autocratic Prime Minister was exactly what Giles and Cade (who looked upon himself as a certainty for the next vacant Premiership) were actively engaged in creating.

Pompeii, on its part, had regarded Giles with unconcealed dislike. Not only his principles but his personality was distasteful to it. He was extremely ill-bred and extremely rude. It was very difficult to keep remarks down to even a decent inaudibility when he sat in the reading-room,

serenely grooming and curtailng his nails with his penknife. One or two people, it is true, had had the temerity to try to snub him, but they might as well have tried to snub a crocodile. Either he did not perceive the intention, or if it were very obvious, he simply revenged himself by insulting them. And when one mild old gentleman gently remonstrated with him about something that his party had done, he retorted, "That's one of your Tory lies," and turned his back on his astonished companion.

He had practised in his younger days at the Old Bailey, taking up the defence of shady cases, and making himself notorious by the brow-beating he used to give to timid witnesses, especially if they were ladies. In a word, he was a thick-skinned bully. You knew it the first moment you looked at him and noticed his low-bred, ill-tempered face, with its brazen expression, on which the real nature of the man was stamped, and which must have been slowly moulded on the stony heart behind it. You knew it from his walk, from the overbearing tones of his voice, from the insufferable presumption of his manner.

The days when he had lived on the proceeds of handbooks, and precarious half-crowns acquired in the shady ways where such small coins lurk, had of course long ago passed away. He was now extremely prosperous. He had blossomed forth in an invulnerably gaudy and tawdry array of the most offensive and defensive natural brass.

He was so assertively resonant and metallic, that one would have expected him to have had the effect of a peripatetic lighthouse, as it were, warning every one off from any near contact with his ideas or person. That he did not entirely do this, but on the contrary was very successful in his own way, is only another proof of how leading a motive interest must be in that complex collection of motives called "human nature."

Our gay and unscrupulous Flashington—clever but conscienceless—was flying about the country and speaking at meetings which were being organised in order to force the party into surrendering to the Prime Minister's schemes. He had been taken up warmly by the National Liberal Club, and his speeches showed such promise (being successfully—well, let us say non-principled) that his

party soon realised what a prize it had won in himself.

And while all these adverse and noxious passions were sufficiently hot and fuming to transform themselves into that pure crystal of party, which, when solidly formed with perfect cohesion, so strangely refracts both the national interest and honour, let us return to Pompeii and see what is going on in that lovely spot.

The great event there had been the arrival of Mr Gradley. He was a power in the State—or at least in his own estimation. He had no politics, but he believed himself to be the confidential friend of the leading Ministers of both parties, and to have a large share of that mysterious force which is said to balance the English Constitution. His claim to exoteric fame rested on the fact that he edited a monthly magazine called the ‘Latter-Day Review,’ not only with the utmost enterprise but with the utmost success. Any one who was in any way illustrious or notorious was asked to contribute an article, and the consequence was a combination of styles, sentiments, expressions, and names that was blinding in its incongruity. Pom-

peii had indeed proved a happy hunting-ground. Smythe had written an article on "The Future of Society," which was eagerly sent for by the great socialistic philosopher (who had never heard of Smythe) when it appeared in the Review, and was consigned to the wastepaper-basket with surprising rapidity after its arrival.

Mrs Leo had promised a symposium on the affections, which was to be called "A Phædrus of the *Cinque Cento*." Mr van Knut was writing on "The Future of American Railway Debenture Bonds"; and as the Review "palpitated with actuality," even Prince Chioggia had been asked to contribute an article on "The Italian Equivalent for Three Acres and a Cow," and M. Courier to give "A Frenchman's Ideas on the Three Estates of the Realm." It will be seen that the title of the article and the name of the author were everything; for it is extremely probable that not only are M. Courier's ideas on the "three Estates" vague and picturesquely misty rather than luminously enlightening, but that he has not even the faintest idea of what "the three Estates of the realm" really consist.

Mr Gradley found out Claud, and wanted him to write on "Tory Democracy," as a young man. Claud told him that he was not a Tory democrat, and did not know much about their principles.

"Well, well," rejoined Mr Gradley, still persevering. "I want, don't you know, an article by a young man who is enthusiastic for his cause. Something eloquent and militant, which regards Toryism as a living and conquering force. Suppose we call it 'The New Toryism, by Young England.' Yes"—he put his head thoughtfully on one side—"yes, that wouldn't sound bad. You would begin by invoking the shades of Pitt and Canning, and then you would come on to the imperial mantle of Lord Beaconsfield—and so on, and so on. I see the makings of a very pretty article. I can spare you seven pages—about 450 words a page, you know—and I must have it ready by the 15th of next month."

Even after receiving these detailed particulars, Claud declined. He assured him that as far as he could judge and had made up his mind, he believed in the old Toryism, the old Liberalism; and that

he mistrusted the new Toryism almost as much as he loathed the new Radicalism.

"But surely that need not prevent you writing the article," said Gradley, with bland incredulity.

"Oh," said Claud, not to be outdone in cynicism, "get Flashington to write it for you. He's the very man to do that sort of thing. And as the article is signed 'Young England' and his name won't appear, I am sure he will be only too delighted. He will pocket the guineas, and no one will be any the wiser."

Six weeks afterwards every one was talking about the invigorating article on "Triumphant Toryism," and none knew that its existence was due to Claud's suggestion and Flashington's resourceful cleverness.

CHAPTER XIV.

ONE fine cool morning the band were playing about eleven o'clock, and had surrounded themselves with groups of people who regarded the sound of music as a signal for assembly, and who therefore now hastened to put in an appearance, either to chat or to listen. The particular morning of which we are writing was even more seductive than usual. There was a gentle breeze, which carried aloft on its shoulders little white wool-like clouds. They were too isolated and insignificant, both too young and too innocent, to hint at rain. They merely made their presence felt by coquetishly slipping in front of the sun at intervals for a few moments. When they had passed gently on, a fresh flood of sunbeams came down on the Forum, and lit up the whole scene with redoubled

splendour. There were the brilliant dresses of the ladies,—the expansive parasols throwing becoming shadows over the delicate faces they guarded so assiduously. The men strolling or lounging about in different costumes, which were picturesque in the varying compromise that convention had made with comfort. A couple of Italian officers, with sparkling epaulets, the tightest of light-grey trousers, and clanging swords, marched up and down—their manner just touched with that harmless and gallant swagger which is characteristic of the military members of their charming nation, but is so entirely free from any conceit or self-consciousness, that one more than forgives its manifestation. There were children playing, and now and then breaking into the music with happy shouts. An even greater air of vivacity than usual pervaded everything. And Miss van Knut, as if to do honour to the occasion, was, if possible, more delightfully dressed than ever.

She looked more than ever like a sketch by a modern French artist. Round her neck was a broad muslin scarf, which broke into an enormous

bow beneath her chin. Her face was shaded by a magnificent parasol—a glorious prize blossom of its race—and further protected from the glare by a thin crimson veil. Her lips, when she smiled, parted until they gave a delicate glimpse of both their rows of little white teeth; and she was smiling now. Jack de Barry was talking to her. He was trying to describe to her the mosaic-like composition of London Society.

“But don’t you ever know any one who is not in Society?” she asked him.

“One has to know a few ‘outsiders,’” he told her. “But the worst of it is, that one never knows what to talk to them about.”

“Surely you must have some topics in common. If there’s nothing else, I suppose you are both subject to the same weather.”

“The weather, the theatres, and the Academy—the three great inevitables from which there is no escape. Yes, every one has something to say about them. But I’ll tell you the kind of thing that puzzles a fellow. The other day I went to a sort of middle-class dance at

Prince's Hall. I was given my ticket of course—it was in aid of a hospital or something. Well, when I got there, there were the most extraordinary couples you ever saw, reversing all over the floor. A red-haired 'outsider' came up to me and asked me if I would dance. I said 'Yes,'—I'm so fatally good-natured, you know. He introduced me to a girl, and she said, 'I don't like this floor as much as the town hall's.' I didn't know what she was talking about. The next-girl said, 'Do you often go to the town hall?' They all talked about the town hall. And would you believe it, I found out next day they were talking about some town hall in West Kensington, where those sort of people go to dance and amuse themselves."

"That shows how the greatest minds may sometimes acquire information from even the lowest of mortals," responded Miss van Knut. "I must remember not to go there when I come to town. Or perhaps," she went on, changing her tone, "as I am not in Society I shall be expected to frequent that sort of place."

"But you are—or you will be in Society when

you come to town. And that reminds me, you must come and have supper with me at 'The Wellington.'"

"And then I suppose I shall be in Society. I think going to Court will be perfectly lovely."

"You'll find it a beastly squash. And ladies' elbows, I'm told, become very sharp, when they're used as a means of progression."

The band were in the midst of the overture to "La Gazza Ladra," which seems to effervesce and bubble over with buoyant youth, and every sort of uncontrollable joy and happiness. The conversation dropped for a moment, and then the music itself suggested a new topic.

"What's come to Italian opera in England?" asked Miss van Knut, leaning back and just crossing her feet, as though she must select the most comfortable of her attitudes before she gave up any more of her mind to conversation.

This was a congenial subject to De Barry. He had strong views on the decadence of opera, and he explained to her that, in a way, its manager had killed the goose with the golden eggs, by encouraging and acquiescing in two prevalent but

fatal ideas, instead of trying to counteract them, and prove them to be false. One was that only Madame Patti paid, and everything therefore must be sacrificed to Madame Patti. The other one was, that it didn't much matter how an opera was performed, as the audience only came to look at one another. At last people found out that they could see their friends elsewhere without paying a guinea and upwards; and so it came to this, that whenever you asked any one if he often went to the opera, he replied, "No, I never go now, for there's nothing worth hearing except Patti; and I've heard her so often, you know." "Then there's the newspapers," he went on; "they are always proposing that we should have better opera at cheaper prices—which, I think, is unreasonable. I say, better operas and more enterprise. Why don't they give us 'Masaniello' with a thoroughly good dancer, for instance, at the same prices? For the London public don't mind paying a great deal for a thing if it is very good; but it must be the *best of its kind*, or they won't pay anything. And that is why Italian opera at cheap prices will never pay in England."

“Anything more?” said Miss van Knut, amused at his earnestness.

“Yes; plenty more. Let the manager treat opera as a serious performance, and not as a frivolous amusement. Let it begin at eight, with never more than ten minutes between the acts—in Vienna they only have about six. Let them bring a thoroughly good ballet-troop from Italy, with a couple of really dramatic ballets, which might be given when light opera is played. Let them revive old operas which every one wants to hear, instead of producing new ones so heavy that they turn the house into a wilderness. And lastly, let them find a tenor who can act as well as sing, and who, if he is not handsome, at any rate looks like a gentleman. When Faust is changed into a young man, doesn’t your heart always beat with alarm at what you are going to see; and then sink when a new variation of a stout and elderly gentleman, in purple cotton velvet, and fat little legs in tights, appears as the result of the best transformation that Mephistopheles can apparently effect? I consider that turning poor old Faust into such a scare-

crow of a young man as one generally sees, is cheating him out of his bargain."

"Yes, even the devil should draw the line somewhere." Then she looked round, and her eyes rested a moment on Redburn, who was talking to some ladies opposite. "You don't make enough of your greatest men," she said.

"Not make fuss enough about them! I'm sure we do. One can't escape from them."

"I mean your authors and artists and musicians, and so on."

"Oh, these sort of people," said De Barry, in a voice which showed that he had never before heard the adjective applied as it was in this instance. "I'm sure we read their books and look at their pictures enough. I don't see that we are called upon to know them."

"It would do you good if you did. Why, in New York we think no end of them."

"Well, you must admit that they're generally disappointing when one meets them. Besides, there are a lot of people now who do ask them to 'at homes'; and there are one or two of them in Society, as well."

"Mr Redburn, for instance?"

"Yes, he is in the smart set. But then he's a privileged person, you know."

"And how does one become a privileged person?"

"That is a mystery which many people are trying to discover, but which no one has fathomed yet. Either you are privileged or you aren't. I suppose it depends on the Goddess of Fashion. You might fancy, for instance, that I'm privileged; but I'm not."

"Is Mr Tottie Fobbes privileged?" asked Miss van Knut, as her eyes lit on that flaccid young gentleman fanning himself with a lady's fan which he had borrowed.

"No. He thinks he is, but he isn't. That's where he makes a mistake, and that's why he was pilled at 'The Wellington.'"

Miss van Knut got up. "I intend to be a privileged young lady myself when I come to town. You can mention it to the right people—the Goddess of Fashion, or whoever is necessary," she said, as she prepared to walk away.

But before she did so De Barry had time to

exclaim, "We are the privileged people, for ours is the privilege of having the pleasure of your acquaintance."

Mrs Leo was firmly planted on a chair a little to the left; and Mawnan had taken possession of the one next to hers. He found, when he had sat down, that Miss Rattletubs was on his right; and so he audibly congratulated himself on being about to participate in a "feast of reason and a flow of soul."

"They say that they are going to put a heavy tax on yachts," said Miss Rattletubs, by way of beginning the flow of soul.

"Dear me! which of your friends is going to do that?"

"I don't know—I heard it. They think that they minister to luxury and ease. There isn't room in the world for yachts nowadays."

"I should have thought that the fuller the world got, the more people would be wanting one to make one's self scarce in a yacht," said Mawnan, pleasantly.

"Miss Rattletubs means that the world will soon be so busy and crowded and poor, that it

will put a stop to all such idle and expensive pastimes," remarked Mrs Leo serenely, contributing her share to the feast of reason.

"Yes, all sport is doomed, they tell me," continued Miss Rattletubs; "and I must say I'm glad of it. It's so horribly cruel. You know, I was one of the originators of the 'Society for the Suppression of Sport.'"

"Well, I really believe with this new Government that *anything* may happen. I hear that some of the under-secretaries are a rum lot."

"They are the real earnest workers,—none of your aristocratic place-hunters. Now we shall see what *real* progress means." Mrs Leo turned round to supply more facts towards reinforcing the statement. "My husband," she said, "thinks the day is not far distant when all the members of the Government will be taken from the middle and lower classes. And then, he says, we shall see the beginning of a new era. Every one will be prosperous and happy. No one will be poor, and no one, Lord Mawnan, will be rich. We shall be pioneers of progress. And we shall be so respected abroad, that we shall be able to

abolish the army and navy, and set the example of a universal peace.”

Lord Mawnan, though he was extremely easy-going as a general rule, sometimes roused himself, and he did so now. He nearly said, “I always told you you’d marry a fool.” And he did permit himself the pleasure of murmuring “Bosh.”

“You may say ‘bosh,’ Lord Mawnan,” put in Miss Rattletubs, in order to prevent the conversation from being brought to a premature stop by such an interjectionary obstacle. “But as some one said,—I really forget who it is at the moment—it may have been that dreadful Lord Beaconsfield—or was it dear John Bright?—I don’t know,—well, as some one said, ‘There is no repartee so crushing as a large majority, and we have the large majority now.’”

“I should have thought you had got far beyond John Bright by this time,” said Mawnan, a little irrelevantly.

“Yes, so we have,” he was answered. “But still he did his best, though I am sorry to say that he was never quite sound on the great female question.”

“And when you have solved the great female question, and have made the race of women quite universal, what shall you do for husbands?” asked Mawnan.

“We shall do very well without them, Lord Mawnan,” said Miss Rattletubs, severely.

“Well, ’pon my word! what’ll become of the race then?”

“Lord Mawnan is only sneering at our endeavours, which he is probably unable either to understand or to appreciate,” put in Mrs Leo, in explanation.

“I don’t at present, but I’m trying to learn. Now tell me about the Church: are you going in for disestablishing that?”

“Of course,” said Mrs Leo. “In these days of enlightenment, can anything be more degrading than a National Church?”

“Well, I’m a Churchwoman myself,” Miss Rattletubs hastened to announce, as she did not approve of the Church’s disestablishment being regarded as a means for weakening religion; “but I’m a member of the Church Liberation Society. They say that when once it has been relieved from

the degrading trammels of the State, it will rise up all the stronger."

"Also, I suppose, relieved from its own endowments?"

"Certainly; we need them for the higher secular education," said Mrs Leo.

"Well," said Miss Rattletubs briskly, having no idea of allowing Mrs Leo to wholly appropriate and distribute the endowments in question, "when these cramping shackles have been struck from the paralysed limbs of the Church, she will probably be able to support herself; and her endowments will revert to the channels originally intended by the donors. They will be used for various religious and philanthropic objects."

"And the cathedrals will be used as music-halls, I presume," said Mawnan.

"No, as museums," said Mrs Leo, solemnly.

"As halls for discussions and meetings, as philanthropic centres, and as places where ministers of all denominations can preach," said Miss Rattletubs, solemnly.

"Even now you don't seem quite agreed as to what to do with the plunder," said Mawnan, rising.

"I am going off in my yacht in a day or two. I shall count upon you to let me know when your millennium is about to begin."

"In order to return?" asked Mrs Leo.

"No, in order to sail away as far and as fast as possible."

"And then?"

"Then I shall probably turn pirate." And he strolled away.

The music or the fine weather, or both, had brought out the beautiful Miss White into the sunshine, and she had placed herself on a chair facing the band. She was considered the belle of Pompeii. She was as tall and as ideally lovely as a statue. She was serene and calm, and always very still. She held that her contribution to Society was given when she permitted it to look upon her; and that, although it ought to try to make itself agreeable by talking to her, it had no claims on her conversation in return.

By her side sat a charming young Guardsman called Bertie Portland. He was always called "Prince Prettyboy"—or "Prettyboy"—in the regiment, because he had once played that part in a

regimental burlesque. He had a sweetly languid and effeminate manner, which, when you knew him, contrasted strangely with his real nature, which was brave, enterprising, energetic, and manly; and he was reported to have done wonders when he was out in the Soudan with the Camel Corps, although he had still retained his manner through every difficulty.

"Tell me all about the Soudan," said Miss White. And a question like this was a sign of unusual interest on her part.

"The whole thing was an awful bore." His lifted wrist showed the sparkle of a bangle beneath his shirt-cuff. "We hadn't even any soap. It's awfully boring when you have no soap."

"Did you get much fun?" asked Miss White, adopting the typical young lady's question, when their curiosity is still in the realm of generalities.

"No. The only fun I got was when I was in hospital. I had a fever or something, and used to fancy I was bear-fighting and making hay in England."

"In the fields?"

"No, in some other chappie's rooms."

"But didn't you save some one's life—weren't you mentioned in despatches?"

"I don't know. I know I made plenty of people save mine. As for despatches, they just shove your name in to fill up—same way as straw is shoved into packing-cases."

"And what do you think of this place?" asked Miss White, with a sense that there was not much amusement to be extracted out of the Soudan through the medium of her present companion.

"Well, I think it is nearly as boring as the Soudan. There's nothing for a chap to do here. I shall go back to town in a day or two."

Then Redburn came up, and they began to talk about some new arrangements which were contemplated at Hurlingham. Portland almost became loquacious when the topic was as important as the question of how often the polo-ground should be watered, and had ceased to deal with his own uninteresting actions.

Miss White looked round, for she was not accustomed to be neglected. Her eyes fell on Mr Smythe, and he hastened to her side. She was one of the finest beauties he had created, and he was

very proud of the performance. He had unearthed her at a suburban dance at the Star and Garter where he had been induced to go by a friend. He had at once marked her down, and had subsequently brought her out at one of the best houses. She had been a great success. Many of "the best people" had taken her up. She and her mother (the widow of a wholesale jeweller) had been borne in triumph by a wave of fashion from the comparative obscurity of Surbiton, and now, resting quiescently upon the shore, she began to sparkle in the dazzling sunshine of Society.

The mother, although not exactly "impossible," was—let us say—"unusual"; and Mr Smythe deemed it wise to keep her as much as possible in the background, where the shadow of her daughter's charms might not add its enhancing gloom to the original shadiness of her appearance.

Arrangements were therefore made with a certain impecunious baronet's wife (who shall be nameless here, for we will respect the confidential nature of the transaction) to introduce her at Court, and to do the necessary chaperoning. When Pompeii was opened, Miss White was elected a

member, but her chaperon was blackballed ; she had therefore been forced to have recourse to her mother's protection, and she had brought her mother out here as her guest. Yet Miss White was neither a heartless daughter nor a scheming girl. She (and indeed her mother also) simply accepted the position, with all the conditions proposed by the world, and quietly admitted the consequences which must follow. One of these was that she should be separated from her mother ; and so they separated, at the call of duty, in the most natural way in the world, without either uttering a complaint or even a murmur. She was a great beauty. She was received and accepted as such. And everything must inevitably be sacrificed to this situation.

Mr Smythe was now in one of the most ingratiating of his moods. He criticised, he advised, he complimented. Would not Miss White like, he asked, to be introduced to the Imperial Court at Vienna ? If only she could arrange to meet Lady B—— at Milan, they could go on there together ; and every one, he assured her, would be at her feet.

And the young lady, who only a year before

could hardly sleep with excitement before a dance at Richmond, now turned her head languidly away, and answered, "No, thank you; it's too fatiguing."

At this moment Darlington and Claud chanced to stroll in from the street leading to the north gate. They had just been for a long scramble up among the vines and olives, over those pebbly paths which wind on for ever between low stone walls, and constantly defer the hope that they will somewhere gently sink into grassy ways, where the footfall will be soundless on the springing turf. They had had many walks together lately. Darlington had found that Miss van Knut's discretion had, for the moment, dominated over her valour, and that their mock courtship was becoming more of a mockery than ever. He had therefore been all the readier to accompany Claud whenever he had proposed a walk. Claud, on his part, was filled with an almost sullen indignation against Fate.

He felt that not only had he not done any wrong, but that he had hardly committed an indiscretion; and now everything seemed to combine to punish him. He had even pledged his word to Mrs Den-

high not to repeat their interview, and therefore he had not the satisfaction of pouring his troubles into the sympathising ear of his companion. He had told him, indeed, that it was hopeless; and Darlington, with his boyish confidence and optimism, had assured him that he would speak to Mrs Denbigh and make it all right. But when he had begun in his delightfully naïve and blundering fashion to develop his views to her on the delicate subject, he had received such a rebuff as he had certainly never received from her before, and probably never from any one else in his life either. He in his turn came to Claud for sympathy, and they decided that either Mr Smythe or Miss Rattletubs, who were the two people in Pompeii they disliked most, must have bewitched her.

“I told her, you know, plainly that my interference was entirely disinterested,” said Darlington—“because I wanted her to understand that she had no chance of catching me. Well, what do you think she said? She said, ‘Lord Darlington, you don’t know what you’re talking about.’”

Claud thanked him for his kind efforts, but asked

him not to make any more in future, as he was sure they were quite useless, and might become worse than useless.

On this particular morning they had not talked about cruel fortune or blighted affection, but, filled with the lightheartedness and hopeful good-humour which are given by youth and healthful exercise, they had scrambled up the hillsides until they found a convenient place for cigars to be lighted and legs to be rested.

Far below them Pompeii was spread out like a little miniature town of cardboard. It looked almost near enough and small enough to be crushed with a stone flung by a careless hand. Two or three yachts were resting at anchor in the little bay. The two friends lazily watched the scene for some time in silence. And then Darlington threw himself on his back, tipped his hat over his laughing eyes, and, still contemplating the scene from between his legs, said—

“Isn’t it rum how near it looks?”

“It’s the clearness of the air, I suppose,” said Claud.

“I wonder where she is now,” said Darlington,

after a pause, only broken by a few philosophical puffs of smoke.

“Who?”

“The Mater.”

“Why, isn’t she in England?”

“No; she is in the train somewhere. She has written to me to say that she has sacrificed everything in order to hasten to rescue me from the toils of the American adventuress.” He still smoked coolly on, and he obviously looked forward to the coming interview with perfect calmness, although whether he felt certain of being victor or vanquished was not apparent. “I believe,” he went on, “that brute of a Mrs Denbigh wrote and put her back up, out of revenge for my taking your side and fighting your battle.”

“I am awfully sorry,” said Claud, “if you get into a row about my affairs.”

“It would have to come out some day,” Darlington replied; and then, in answer to a question of Claud’s, he assured him that he was not really engaged, but soon hoped and intended to be. “They’ll kick up an awful row at home,” he said, with such perfect equanimity that it would

have sounded ludicrous to any one who did not know that everything that his parents' darling did, although it might appear reprobable at the moment, was always finally found to be quite right. "I believe they consider I'm booked to one of the Doncaster girls. How those dear girls will open their eyes when they read of my engagement in the 'Morning Post'!"

"But you're not engaged yet," suggested Claud.

"No; but I soon shall be. I'm going to take time by the forelock and propose before the Mater arrives."

"You'd really better wait, Darlington, till your mother comes," said Claud, in an earnest voice, and with sufficient anxiety about Darlington's resolve to make him sit up by way of emphasising his words. It was useless.

"I think I'll go and get engaged before lunch," said Darlington, in a tone which showed that he regarded "getting engaged" as much the same sort of simple action as having one's hair cut, for instance.

"You don't know yet that she'll have you," said Claud, laughing.

But even this gloomy reflection did not ruffle Darlington's composure. "Oh yes," he said, shying a stone into a neighbouring vineyard, which was apparently aimed at Pompeii itself; "she'll have me. Come along." And the two young men retraced their steps and found themselves in the Forum, as we have before seen.

Darlington, with that perfectly natural coolness and assurance which is one of the attributes of an aristocratic race, strolled up to Miss van Knut.

"I say," he began, "will you come and eat oranges in the orange-orchard?"

Miss van Knut thought that it was too near lunch-time.

"Oh, come along," he said, with almost brotherly bluntness.

"I suppose I must yield," she answered, rising slowly. And as she did so she added that she was sure her father would like to come and suck oranges too.

Darlington unceremoniously brushed aside her intention of looking for her father by telling her that there was no time to find him now.

As they pushed their way over the stones in

the path leading to the orange-grove, their talk came fitfully, and confined its attention to passing trifles.

"We mayn't have many walks more," said Darlington, in a voice which was intended to be pathetic. "I may be summoned home to my constituency."

"Can't they tune up without you?"

"Well, if there was a dissolution, I suppose I ought to show up. There are such a rum lot in the Government now that my father says they can't stay in long."

"Isn't your father in the Government?"

"Well; he's in the Household. But I meant the Secretaries of State and those sort of people. I hope he'll get the Buckhounds in the next respectable Liberal Government."

"The Buckhounds! My, how majestic! How reverent I shall feel if he does. What are his duties? Has he to feed them himself?"

"He hunts 'em, and sends out the invitations for the enclosure at Ascot. That's what my mother wants. She wants to get at the list and overhaul it." Then Darlington changed his tone, for he sud-

denly remembered that he had led up to what he was going to say. So in a tone of almost comic gravity he began, "My mother is coming here soon."

They had reached the oranges. They were already seated on the grass with an orange apiece when this announcement was made. It did not seem to produce the expected effect on Miss van Knut. She continued to peel her orange, and only expressed a conventional pleasure at the prospect of seeing the Countess, by way of reply.

Darlington had adopted the primitive fashion of cutting a hole in his orange, and then sucking out its juice. He now removed it from his mouth, and turned to his companion.

"She won't understand our compact," he said, solemnly.

"I guess it will be a good opportunity to drop it then," replied Miss van Knut briskly, eating her orange the while.

He stood up. His handsome winning face seemed suddenly to become vivid with a new earnestness. "I want you to understand," he said; "I want our compact to be a real one."

She also stood up; but while he had thrown his orange away, she played with hers, in a manner which seemed to betray a touch of unconscious nervousness and irritation.

“Don’t be silly, Lord Darlington,” she said, very quickly. Her breath came and went with a little startled flutter of surprise. “We have always been good friends; don’t spoil it now.”

“I know you will think it absurd; but I really love you—’pon my soul I do,” pleaded Darlington, in his quaint, irresistible, boyish way. “It’s very unkind of you to laugh at me,” he added, as he caught sight of a coming smile.

Miss van Knut had rapidly made up her mind to pass the whole thing off as a joke. It would require a little acting; for she had been startled, surprised, annoyed—everything but amused at the declaration. And deep down in her heart there was a certain tenderness for the boy, which she was resolved should never develop lovewards in the fostering light of encouragement, and which it therefore behoved her at once to bury out of sight, trample down, and instantly ignore. When she had made up her mind to do a thing, she generally

did it thoroughly. So now a smile was summoned ; and though her voice trembled a little—perhaps with suppressed enjoyment—it sounded its brightest tones as she answered, —“ You are only a boy, and don’t know what you are saying. I will forgive you on condition that you solemnly promise never to be so foolish again.”

There would have been something almost ludicrous in the headlong earnestness, the reckless rush of declarations, with which Darlington tried to sweep away every obstacle, if real passion were ever merely ludicrous. Certainly this was the last point of view of the situation which could have presented itself to Miss van Knut. She found that it required the lightest hand, the assumption that even the idea was too ridiculous for serious discussion—the foe kept, as it were, beyond speaking distance by flights of playful arrows—in order to prevent the citadel itself capitulating in grim earnest.

At last Darlington, tired out with pleading, made more eloquent than he knew by large blue eyes, and gentle voice, and sympathetic nature, said—“ Then I shall speak to your father,” with a sudden air of

dignity which he must have inherited from his mother, and which contrasted grotesquely with his simple and unassuming self.

And so Miss van Knut was able to laugh outright at last. "We do not live in the feudal ages—in America," she said. "Fancy my 'papa delivering me up at your castle drawbridge, bound captive, to be your slave! I should just like to see him do it. Why, in America parental obedience is the great virtue we inculcate. I shall have to bring up papa to keep you at a distance, Lord Darlington."

If a joke was intended, he did not accept it. "These oranges are beastly; we may as well be going back," he said simply. And back they went, interchanging a fitful conversation, which proved to be even more disjointed than that which accompanied their ascent.

CHAPTER XV.

CLAUDIA had lately taken to sketching out of doors. She liked the long rambles, the quiet resting-place, —so quiet up there among the olives and the vines, —the peace and stillness of sitting down on some grassy bank and painting away to her heart's content, where the sounds of the busy life below, if they reached her at all, came only as a distant hum. Sometimes she sat on the shore and painted the water and rocks and the shelving sands. Sometimes she wandered inland, and took little sketches of that exquisite coast, where Nature seems to have lost herself in a tangled web of florid beauty beyond the power of any reproduction. She painted the children, stopping them as they passed with their hands full of flowers, and talking to them gently while she

drew their bright Southern faces and their little bare brown arms and legs. She sketched a wonderful old wrinkled peasant, who told her tales of battles long ago, when he had helped to fight the Austrian foe and they had driven him back from their homes and their own native land. She liked to talk to the peasants, to hear their gossip and listen to their sorrows. And she could not help thinking that their lot was harder than that of the agricultural labourers in England, and yet that they bore it so much more cheerfully, so much more uncomplainingly. She decided it must be the warmth, the sunshine, the climate, that made the difference, that gave the light to their eyes and sent the blood to their cheeks, as it bottled its own sweet essence in each of the swelling grapes, which hung in such purple bunches over their cottage-doors.

The truth was that Claudia was restless. She had tried to banish all thoughts of Claud, even to banish wonder at his silence. She did not allow herself to think of him, and then she persuaded herself she did not love him; and then she scolded herself for having permitted the remembrance of him to dwell in her memory for a moment.

And yet, in spite of all this drilling and discipline with which she rigorously schooled her mind, a gentle, half-unconscious, feminine curiosity sometimes took possession of her. She knew there was a check somewhere. Was it due to Claud or his uncle, or even to her own mother? Was it permanent? Would he go away without another word? Would they never meet again, or only as comparative strangers, she wondered; and the sweet words "I love you" from those lips never ring in her ears or burn in her heart again? She told herself that she did not love him; and still the prospect of their parting, with the casual good-byes of friendly acquaintanceship, filled her with a vague disappointment. Then a maidenly reserve would come upon her with a rush, that hurried blushes upwards, and almost fiercely struck down the memories she had been tending so kindly, as though they had no rightful place among the musings of a young girl's heart.

One day she had climbed up higher than ever. She painted vigorously,—for she found, like other people, that absorbing occupation drives out even anxious insistent thought. She painted on for

some time, until with a careless movement of her left hand she suddenly upset her painting-water.

There was a cottage a short way off, whose bright pink walls shone through veiling vines. Around its open door roses and jessamine clambered in exultant emulation. She determined to ask for some water there, and went up to the porch; but finding that her knock was unanswered, she walked in. The room was small and dark. The climbing plants had crossed the window, and their leaves let in the filtered light but slowly. Looking round, she perceived a little cot in one corner. On it lay a dark-haired, dark-eyed child, who seemed to cover her with the fixed appealing gaze of a dumb animal. The child lay motionless, and yet with those widely open eyes she could not be asleep. Was she ill? could she be unconscious? Claudia thought; and she spoke to her gently, and even touched the child's forehead with her hand. The child moved a little, and Claudia ventured to ask her in Italian if she were not ill. She answered "Yes," giving a momentary smile as she did so. Claudia sat down by her side, and taking her hot

little hand in her own, began to talk to her gently. She soon learnt from the child that she was nine years old; that two years before she had slipped out of her father's arms when he was carrying her down to a *fiesta* in the village below, and that ever since then she had been unable to walk. She had lain here for two long years, and had never even moved across the room. Her parents were very poor, she said, and her mother was out all day working in a scent factory, so that she was always alone all the long, long day. The poor little thing had no books, no toys, no companions; the birds grew so tame in summer, that when she sprinkled some crumbs from her dinner of bread, they would fly into the room, and even hop upon her coverlid.

Claudia asked her if she did not sometimes see the doctor. The child replied that he came only twice a-year, and then always said she would be better some day. "But some day is so long," the child said, with a weary tone in her voice, called up by the recollection of all the endless countless days that had come and gone without making her any better; and Claudia suspected that "some day" was but

the professional way of saying the doomed word "never." She could not help contrasting her own little troubles, and the so-called troubles of all the people around her, with those of this poor child, helpless, comfortless, all but deserted, on the couch before her. And without unduly moralising—for Claudia did not moralise—she unconsciously felt that as her sympathy flowed out it was replaced by a contrasting comfort.

She asked about the girl's parents, and learnt that her mother came from Sicily. Then the child's eyes suddenly lighted up with excitement for a moment. "Oh, I have an uncle there," she said, with an air of triumph, "who is a great man. He is a captain of brigands. Every one fears him—even the English. He takes them, and they give him so much money." Then she added in a sadder voice than Claudia had yet heard, for it was obviously the crowning disappointment of her life, "And now I shall never see him!"

Claudia was rash enough to suggest that perhaps he might have to run away from Sicily, and then he might come here. But the child had a touching faith that no such misfortune could befall him.

“Oh no,” she said, “he is quite safe. His patron saint watches over him, because he is very pious, and after my uncle has caught any one he gives him such beautiful presents. And all the poor people love him; they will pray for him, too.”

“Well,” said Claudia cheerfully, “we must hope for the best. I will come and see you again very soon.” She said good-bye with a smile of sympathy, which was only less beautiful than the little one winged with gladness and gratitude that fluttered for a moment around the sad child’s eyes in response.

And having provided herself with water from a trough which caught a spout of mountain stream, Claudia returned to her water-colours, and sat down to paint in a far more contented mood than before.

But she was again destined to an interruption. She had not been painting for more than a few minutes, when the substantial form of Mr van Knut loomed above a jutting rock a little below the place where she was sitting.

“Well,” he said in his cheery voice, “this is real nice; I’ve found a companion and a cunning little

seat, so I'll stop and have a chat with you, if you don't mind, for I've come quite long ways enough already." He sat down and talked on in his shrewd, sensible, extremely well-informed way: he was a very good talker, and, like many Americans, gave away his best conversation to every one with generous indiscrimination, and did not, like too many Englishmen, keep it for persons and occasions, that had been carefully selected with a view to produce the most telling effect with the least expenditure of material.

In this way she gathered a great deal of information about America during the half-hour that they sat there. And when she rose to return, he proposed that they should walk down together. He was extremely cordial in his manner; indeed it became so kind as almost to be parental. Claudia felt that, for some reason or other (and in the bottom of her heart she divined it), he wished her to consider him a true friend. Miss van Knut in her frank open way had already said to her, "Lord Darlington and I are doing our best to impress Mrs Denbigh with Mr Brownlow's charms;" and Claudia had always known that they would do all

in their power to help Claud—and herself. Probably, therefore, this extreme kindness on Mr van Knut's part was a delicate way of indicating that he also was an ally. She felt very grateful to him, and their homeward walk seemed wonderfully shortened by the friendly talk that so pleasantly occupied them.

After Mr van Knut had deposited her at her mother's rooms, he made his way to the billiard-rooms. There was a "pool" going on, and quite a crowd of men—either playing or watching—were gathered round the table.

Bertie Portland and De Barry were sitting on a raised seat at one end of the room, which commanded a view of the table.

"Never drink champagne at a widow's house," Bertie said, by way of localising a remark about the wine of evening parties.

"I never do," said De Barry.

"Once," continued Bertie, "I tasted some fizz at a widow's, which was so beastly that I looked at the label on the bottle."

"Had the bottle cast off all shame and declared itself gooseberry?"

“On the bottle was ‘Fine Foaming Champagne, bottled in Dublin.’”

“Oh, my dear! weren’t you very ill on the spot?”

“No; but I was next morning,” replied Bertie, slowly getting up for his turn at pool; and as he did so, sparing a moment to turn his head round and add, “It was worse than anything in the Soudan, I assure you.”

He did everything with a lazy and gracefully indolent confidence, that generally gave onlookers, who could not help sharing it, a certain assurant pleasure. He now “potted” the ball he was playing on, and came back when his turn was finished.

“Has Miss Rattletubs been at you yet?” asked Redburn.

“My dear chap,” he answered, “she flew at me. Before I could speak, she crammed my pockets with little books for the privates. I don’t know what to do with them.”

“Send ’em to Smythe for a joke. Wrap them up in a piece of paper, with ‘From one who fears that your heart is too much given to this world’ written on it.”

“I will — rather a good idea. Fancy Smythe

getting 'The Lancer's True Saddle; or, Look to your Girths, and your Drinks will take care of Themselves'! She threatens us at the Agricultural Hall."

"What! at the Tournament?"

"Yes. Are you going to do anything?"

"Tent-peg, I think," said Redburn, getting up to light his cigar.

"Red on white," called the marker.

Up rose Bertie; and Mr van Knut coming in at that moment, appropriated his seat. Redburn began to sound him on the likelihood of a repeal of the American tariff on pictures, and also asked him about the market for them in America. He was a man who knew how to launch his little paintings on the world under the best auspices and the most appreciative prices. Mr van Knut gave him as much information as he could, and then began to talk about enterprise in general, and American enterprise in particular.

"Now what could be more wonderful than our elevated railroad or your Metropolitan?" he asked, by way of a remark.

"I'm told that yours is beastly for the houses,

and ours is beastly for the passengers," put in Bertie, returned from the game, after having divided the pool.

"Have you never been in the Metropolitan?" asked Redburn.

"Once; but I found it full of horrid eager people pushing—pushing," said Bertie, in his languid way.

Mr van Knut was a little scandalised at this view of the question. To him crowds of eager people meant successful enterprise and substantial dividends. At the moment that he was going to make a protest, Darlington hurried—indeed almost rushed—in, his hat on the back of his head, his shining hair over his eyes, his face quite magnetic with excitement. "I want to speak to you," he said; and before the astonished gentleman could substitute a new protest for the one already on his lips, he found himself swept out of the room and into the Forum.

"Dear me," cried Tottie, in the midst of a feeble imitation of a French *café-chantant* singer, "Darlington's off his chump! I daresay Eliza has refused him. I can't help bursting out laughing whenever I think of Darlington in love with that girl. I'm

sure she covers her cheeks with paint. Perhaps it comes off when he kisses her. I hear his dear mamma is on the road. She'll scratch at Eliza. She has always intended him to marry one of the Stiltons,—you know, those fat girls who dress on £30 a-year each, though their father has £30,000 a-year. I've played tricks on 'em myself. We were staying in a country house together. I hid behind the curtains when I heard Darlington and Lucy coming. I thought they were going to make love. But all Darlington said was, 'Do you like chocolate-creams?' So I jumped out with a scream. She screamed. You can't think how funny she looks when she screams with her mouth open. I saw all her false teeth. Wouldn't it be fun to steal 'em some night when she is asleep!"

And yet there were people who were bored by Tottie.

Redburn and Bertie betook themselves off, leaving De Barry, who was very good-natured and outwardly tolerated *every one*, to continue as a recipient of Tottie's chatter.

Darlington had swept Mr van Knut on to a

terrace that skirted the sea-shore. It was gracefully terminated by a semicircular marble seat, copied from an antique one, and delightfully shaded by stately myrtles and clustering roses with blossoms of dusky red.

"Now," began Darlington, nearly incoherent, for once, with blushes and confusion, "I can speak to you. The fact is—of course you know—I'm in love with your daughter. I want to marry her; and she says she won't have me."

Mr van Knut could hardly help smiling at his tone of puzzled distress. Darlington evidently did not realise, indeed could not believe, that he was really refused. He spoke as though there must be a mistake somewhere, and he had come to Mr van Knut in order to have the misunderstanding put right.

"Speaking for myself, I need not say that I am extremely gratified at your proposal, and that nothing would give me greater pleasure than to see you and my daughter man and wife," Mr van Knut said, in his cordial way. "But, you know, in America the parents have to let the young people settle these sort of things for themselves."

Then he added with an air which was a quaint mixture of conscious humour and powerless resignation, "If Eliza says No, I'm really afraid I mustn't encourage you."

"But I think she does love me. I am sure she likes me," persisted Darlington, looking all the handsomer for his earnestness. "I think she refuses me because—well, because she seems to think it would be taking some sort of mean advantage of me in my parents' absence." He got up; indignation—the outraged indignation of boyish self-esteem—made him feel quite hot. "She seems to think I'm only a child, instead of a man."

Mr van Knut permitted a genuine smile to alight on his face this time. He also stood up, and put his hand on Darlington's shoulder with fatherly kindness. "Believe me," he said, "Lord Darlington, it is better to wait a little. Don't do anything more till you have spoken to your people, especially as your mother is coming here in a day or two."

"I will get my mother to talk to her; she will put everything straight," Darlington said with sublime assurance—assurance which even this petted boy did not really feel; for was not his frightened

mother flying (by the mechanical aid of an express train) on the wings of maternal anxiety to rescue her darling son from the "fatal entanglement," as she called it?

"Yes, yes—you had much better wait and talk it over with her," said Mr van Knut kindly. And then he took Darlington's arm and gently steered that extremely disconcerted young gentleman homewards. His expansive kindness, his broad common-sense, had at all times a soothing influence; and now it was not therefore long before Darlington's sanguine nature and high spirits were reawakened, and he felt convinced that everything was going to turn out exactly as he could have wished.

CHAPTER XVI.

"THE Countess of Downstreamdown has arrived at Pompeii," the 'Morning Post' announced. And the 'Morning Post' was right.

That august lady had arrived, and had lost no time in seeking Mrs Denbigh in order to learn the worst. Her dutiful son, who ought to have met her at the station, was at Monte Carlo. But she was rather relieved by his absence, as she would be all the more able to ascertain exactly what had happened, and how far her precious boy had compromised himself.

She herself was a woman who was sufficiently described by the imposing and inclusive adjective "majestic."

She was extremely alarming to people whom she wished to alarm. She was extremely well-bred—so

well-bred, indeed, that she was able to add a touch of the finest insolence to her manner, without its being detected as such. The days of *grandes dames* are said to be over; but she was as nearly a *grande dame* as it would be possible for any one to be in the present day. She was the daughter of a duke. Her mother had been the daughter of a neighbouring peer. Two of her three sisters had married peers. Indeed she seemed related to nearly half the peerage. Her whole mind and character had been formed in the cold rarefied air of aristocratic tradition, amid the very topmost heights of Society. Her very atmosphere was one of privileged exclusion. She breathed it, she lived in it as in her natural element; she no more felt its exhausting rarefaction than we feel the pressure of our own material atmosphere. She had been extremely handsome in a large, noble, stately way. And having all her life been very determined, perfectly calm, and serenely unworried, she still retained enough beauty to satisfy both her friends and herself. She embodied the aristocratic principle so supremely and with such perfect assurance, that you could not but feel, when you looked at her, how far England must

still be from the complete conquest of Democracy. You almost gained physical courage in her presence—that is, courage to uphold the old order and all that it involves; and he would have been a bold man who should have dared to whisper a word for democratic progress in her hearing. She was, to put it shortly, a great Whig lady, whose faith in her order, her party, its influence and its traditions, was still unshaken. And she held that the presence of persons like Cade in the Cabinet was alone sufficient to bring on it the wrath of Heaven, and to foredoom it initially to failure and nothingness.

After the Countess and Mrs Denbigh had exchanged the remarks usual to the occasion of arrival, the Countess took a seat and asked, with a calmness which might or might not betoken aristocratic despair, to be allowed to hear the worst. Mrs Denbigh had no need of the interrogation to add eloquence of expression to her already indignant attitude towards the young lady in question. She poured forth a verbal caricature, and bedaubed it largely in sinister colours from her own imagination. Lady Downstreamdown received it all. She accepted the account without, indeed, any mental

reservations, but with a determination to test it herself by the original. The time had now arrived, she considered, when some useful leading questions might be put.

“Are there any mitigations?” she asked in her stately way.

Mrs Denbigh assured her that it was generally believed that the young lady would inherit her father’s fortune, as she was an only child. This information was a double comfort to the Countess. In the first place, it might add a silver—or even a golden—lining to the cloud, if Darlington should madly persist. And in the second place, it would so add to the young lady’s attractions in the eyes of the world, that it might induce others to seek her, and also make her more exacting in her own choice.

“I should like to see this young lady—what is her name?”

“Miss van Knut.”

“Miss van Knut! Could she be sent for, do you think?”

“Hardly,” replied Mrs Denbigh, having a keen appreciation of Eliza’s independence and high

spirits. "She is so—so American, that she would probably decline to come. But if we were to walk out, we should probably find her."

The two ladies strolled down the picturesque little street, and before they reached the Forum had fallen in with Mr Smythe. Whether that gentleman had actually waylaid them must remain uncertain; it was certainly an extremely fortunate meeting for him if it were accidental, for it gave him the opportunity of pointing out to the Countess all the wonders and beauties around, and also of renewing an acquaintance which before had been of the slightest. The Countess neither liked nor approved of Mr Smythe, although she hated the type to which he belonged, and which she designated "parasites," much more than she hated this individual specimen. Besides, had he not written to her a most judicious letter about Darlington's horrible infatuation for the young American person? Henceforth she decided that she would be a little more cordial to Mr Smythe when they met in Society. She was still, however, determined that he should never visit at her house. He was not even asked to Marlborough House, and there was

certainly no reason why *she* should ever receive him.

They passed through the Forum, and they looked into the little temple-like rooms on either side of it. The Countess admired the reading-rooms and the beautiful classical dining-rooms. There were banks of growing flowers; fountains playing up into the sunlight, and falling with a cool and gentle plash into their marble basins; little tables that tempted to five-o'clock tea. There seemed to be delightful people everywhere. The Countess met a dozen friends in as many minutes. Claud, whom she knew slightly, was one of these. Now she felt that he would be invaluable as a source of further information, and so she proposed that he should give her some tea at one of the cosy tables. Mr Smythe felt that he was dismissed. He walked off with Mrs Denbigh, leaving Claud to wait on the Countess. When the snowy cloth was enriched by a delightful spread of tea-things and tea-cake, the Countess began to lament the dreadful incident which had brought her to Pompeii.

She had not, however, lamented long, before Claud rose up as a champion, not only for Darlington—

which was only right, and what might have been expected—but for the young lady as well. He assured the Countess that when she came to know Miss van Knut, she would find out what a really noble nature the girl had. The Countess was obviously not reassured.

Claud pushed back his chair, and became almost eloquent on Miss van Knut's behalf. The Countess put it down in her mind to the blinding fascination of young ladies over the susceptible hearts of the opposite sex.

At last he thought of a conquering stroke of comfort.

He leant forward again, and said in his most confidential voice, "Do you know, I really believe she would not have Darlington if he were to ask her."

The Countess felt almost sure that such an attitude on the part of any young lady's heart was practically an impossibility. And yet she cherished the forlorn hope of anything so abnormal as almost too good to be true. She leant back in her chair, and held up her double eye-glass in order to survey the company.

“Who is that very good-looking man over there—the one who is so beautifully dressed?” she asked, with the air of a lady who is privileged to interrogate.

“Redburn, I think you mean,” answered Claud, looking across the room to where Redburn and Portland were also enjoying an innocent five-o’clock tea. “I daresay you have heard of him—he paints.”

“Yes,” said the Countess. Then she added, “When I was a girl, young men in Society didn’t paint.”

“I suppose the account about Clive’s being an artist in the ‘Newcomes’ is not exaggerated. You remember how shocked the Park Lane people were at his painting.”

Lady Downstreamdown did not respond with any further reminiscences, but asked him who the other young man was with the charming smile. She had often met him, she said; but he had never been introduced to her.

Claud told her that it was Bertie Portland, who was considered to be the most charming and the most socially caressed young man in London.

"Of course; I knew his father," the Countess said, and would have dropped her glasses, had not the appearance of an advancing girl rapidly passed across their field of vision.

Claud did not give her time to inquire who the young lady might be. "That is Miss van Knut," he said quickly, fearing that that young lady had already come within range of his voice.

"Introduce me," said the Countess solemnly.

Claud went up to Miss van Knut and told her that Darlington's mother had arrived, and was anxious to make her acquaintance. He had no need to make any further explanations, for Miss van Knut came forward with frank alacrity. She was not in the least abashed or embarrassed. She took the Countess's slowly outstretching hand in her own and shook it warmly. "I am real pleased to meet you," she said, without a shade of self-consciousness; "Lord Darlington has talked to me so much about you."

"I can wish no better recommendation than to find that any one whom I hope to be friends with is already a friend of my son's," said Lady

Downstreamdown, with a certain old-world ceremonial courtesy which was at least impressive.

The two ladies sat down. Claud had discreetly retired. Miss van Knut felt a strange unreality, a vague artificiality, beneath the words of the Countess. It was as though she had wandered into some old chateau, where, amid ancient furniture and musty heirlooms, she had been received by the great lady of the house—hooped and powdered—with all the stately ceremony of regal times in other centuries. She longed above all things to bring the conversation down to her own plebeian and practical level.

“Are all Lord Darlington’s lady friends yours also?” she asked, for the sake of saying something, and with an innocent air, which she would have been the last person to have been capable of assuming, had she either realised or been capable of understanding all the ground that the question might be supposed to cover.

The Countess was not disconcerted, simply because it was impossible by the laws of her being that she ever should be. But she covered her astonishment with a fixed look, which in any one

else would have been a stare. She drew in a breath as though to fill up her reservoir of collecting forces, and said, "My son has, I daresay, many chance acquaintances which I have not the pleasure of sharing; but we naturally like to know any one with whom he is intimate." And then, after a moment's pause, as if she were deciding how far to go, she said, "Our son would never, I am sure, form any serious attachment without our sanction."

Miss van Knut was suddenly seized with an irresistible desire to tease this great aristocratic lady, whose mental momentum was sufficient to overbear any but the most resolute and plucky of mortals. She was helping herself to a cup of tea; she paused, and looking up at the Countess with the sweetest of smiles, said in an inimitably simple way, "Then I am still more glad than ever that we have been able to meet." She suddenly dropped her eyes, as she continued, "For if you like to meet Lord Darlington's intimate friends, you can imagine how delighted they must be to have the pleasure of meeting his mother."

She felt that she had thrown the gauntlet down

at last, and had probably succeeded in absolutely frightening her companion. Knowing that, in reality, she had refused his lordship, and that she was therefore an entirely harmless person, she felt a delightful exultation in this.

The Countess was now (as a classical author might say) divinely armed with awful majesty for the coming combat.

"Are you one of his intimate friends?" she asked.

"He says so. He says we're very intimate for Europe," replied her companion in her most collected manner. "I'm much more intimate with most of my gentleman friends in America; but then in Europe they say that girls can't be very intimate with gentlemen. At least Lord Darlington says so: he has been teaching me deportment—European deportment. May I trouble you for another cup of tea?—thank you so much. He says I haven't reticence enough—or 'hypocrisy,' as he calls it. Is a great deal of hypocrisy necessary in Europe before one can be considered well-bred?"

"Yes," said the Countess, becoming monosyllabic

in her dignity, and determined not to follow up any side issues that might be presented to her. "But in Europe, Miss van Knut, a certain amount—I will not go so far as to say of reticence, but a certain amount of reserve and discretion, is expected from every young lady. I daresay we vary from America in this respect, as we do in so many other ways."

Miss van Knut knew that she had provoked the outburst. She therefore restrained herself from feeling incensed—in this way differing from most of her sex, who are generally unable to look at their own attitude, and the attitude they have provoked in others towards themselves, with impersonal impartiality. She simply contented herself with a change of front, having admitted to herself that her present one was becoming slightly false, and said, "I hope you will like me a little better when you come to know me."

The Countess was almost touched by the artlessness of the appeal. "I am sure of it," she said kindly.

"And as far as I am concerned, you can set

your mind at rest," continued Miss van Knut, a little hurriedly, and with the air of making somewhat of a confession. "I have already told Lord Darlington that this marriage is impossible. In short, I also will withhold my consent; and so you see"—as she spoke she looked up again, with just the slightest twinkle beginning to struggle in her eyes for an acknowledged existence—"we can combine to refuse our sanction to this serious attachment."

The Countess rose up slowly.

"My dear," she said, "you should not conceal your discretion so thoroughly, for you have really a great deal. I need not tell you how deeply we thank you for"—she was going to say, "for this sacrifice," but checked herself, and substituted, "for having treated our son's passing fancy as it deserved."

"But I guess I don't really love him."

"Oh no," murmured the Countess.

"And that is why I refused him. If I had really loved him, I should have said Yes in spite of every one."

"Of course," the Countess answered, feeling that

now, all danger being over, she might cheerfully oil the troubled waters with a few acquiescences. Through it all, she felt a vague wonder at the young girl's conduct. No English girl, she mentally decided, could nerve herself to such a great renunciation. She was going to add an expression of hope that she should have the pleasure of seeing a great deal of Miss van Knut in the future, when she was interrupted by the sudden appearance of the young gentleman himself from Monte Carlo.

He hurried in, and then stopped for a moment as though paralysed. His face, which was a delightfully expressive one, told with an almost ludicrous distinctness how extremely disconcerted the naughty boy was at finding his mother engaged in apparently confidential talk with his own Eliza.

He recovered himself in an instant—the pause and the expression had come and gone like a breath—and rushed up to his mother. They exchanged greetings, among which he managed to insert an apology for his absence during her arrival.

“And how much of your money have you lost at Monte Carlo?” asked Miss van Knut demurely.

"How much do you think?" he asked in return.

"You must not allow him to go there any more," said Miss van Knut to the Countess, taking no notice of Darlington's question.

"My dear boy, what would your father say if he knew you frequented that dreadful place?" asked his mother, with her reproof thus modified and softened by the indirectness of its sheltered attack.

"He would probably say, 'You damned young fool,'" replied Darlington, with a dance of delight in his eyes at the startlingly literal truth of his answer.

"Hush!" said his mother. "How much have you really lost to-day?" she asked, by way of turning the conversation.

"I've won £20," he said, with a triumphant air of having "scored" off his mother's surmises.

"That will come in very nicely when we are at Venice," said the Countess.

"At Venice!" responded Darlington blankly.

Then the Countess informed him that she was intending to proceed to Venice in a day or two, under his escort. Darlington did not intend to go, and indeed hinted as much. But the subject was

not further pursued. The three got up as soon as Darlington had refreshed himself with some tea, and went out into the Forum. The band was playing. People were sitting about enjoying the comparative coolness of the air after the warmth of the day. The whole place was so inviting, that the Countess and her son took a couple of chairs where they could listen to the music and watch the moving people, who were slowly walking up and down to earn the relaxation that comes from gentle exercise. Miss van Knut had taken the opportunity of quietly slipping away, so that mother and son were left alone together.

The Countess had too much tact to touch on the dangerous subject, and would have entertained the young man for an indefinite period with accounts of everything which had been going on in England which in any way interested him. But Darlington plunged at once into the middle of the dear topic that filled his soul to overflowing.

"She will not have me," he cried, with despairing brevity.

"My dear boy, I want to speak very seriously to you about this young lady. I am, I admit, more

favourably impressed by her than I expected. But in this life we may meet many people who are both agreeable and whom we become fond of (whom we 'fall in love with,' as you express it), but whom it will not do to marry. A man in your position, my son, must not propose to the first girl who catches his fancy."

"Well, mother, I never did it before," pleaded Darlington.

"And must never do it again," added his mother quickly.

"I shall never do it again if she won't have me."

"She had the good sense to realise that it was an offer which she could not accept," said the Countess deliberately.

Darlington cried out that she could and must accept it. He poured forth his love into his mother's ears. And that astonished lady suddenly realised that she was expected to further his suit by all the means at her disposal. She determined neither to argue nor to reason with him at the present moment. But at the same time she did not see that there was much chance of an immediate start for Venice.

Darlington was a young gentleman whose charming manners had generally secured him his "own way," when all other reasons for getting it had failed him. Never before, however, had his "own way" been at such cross-purposes to that of his parents. And his mother was acutely aware that it would require the most skilful tactics (and she was an accomplished tactician) to "play" him successfully.

He settled himself in his chair, his hat slipping back from his forehead a little, so that his hair peeped out under its brim; he stretched out his long slim legs, and plunged his hands deeply into his trouser-pockets—an attitude always assumed by him for assisting determined thought—before he announced that as soon as "other people" departed for London he must also return; for the elections might come on at any time, and his mother knew that it was his duty to be looking after his expectant constituents.

The Countess began to talk over their county Division with him. The last notes of music found mother and son immersed in congenial plans for his future career in Parliament; and for the moment

she felt assured that, even if love had not taken a lower place to make room for ambition, the fierce joys of the coming contest would finally tend to obliterate the perversely amorous yearnings of her troublesome son.

CHAPTER XVII.

WE must now return to some of our other friends at Pompeii, who had been pursuing their several ways without being troubled by any thoughts of marrying or giving in marriage. Mrs Leo, for instance, had long before this exhausted all the attractions that the place might at one time have offered her. She was extremely anxious to start as soon as possible for Sienna. There, in the midst of the solemn, stately, old-world city, she hoped to absorb the medieval atmosphere, and intended to write a historical novel after the style of Fortini. It was to be full of a delicate and exotic voluptuousness. It might prove to be a little wanton and overwrought, perhaps, in its languid loveliness; but it was to be charged with a subtle breath of art and culture. There would be scenes in gay Italian castles

—castles not grim and darkly stern as in the North, but bright with all the dainty life of gentlest feudalism, mellowed by sunshine and sweetness and joy into the urbane grace of Southern chivalry. There would be gallant knights and noble ladies, with glorious faces, passionate natures, and subtle faculties for good or ill; falconers, grooms, and pages leading the milk-white hounds. Soldiers and attendants would fill the galleries and people the courtyards. There would be banquets, with perhaps a lurking cup of poison amid the flowers; pageants and festivals, happy parties encamped beside the forest-trees or wandering along the paths of the trim gardens; love with the moonlight mother, tuning the silver lutes and mandolins that would whisper their serenades so discreetly beneath remembered casements timidly opening on to the warm and amorous night. In a word, Mrs Leo intended that it should be a delicious novel of the *cinque cento*; and considering the people, the manners, the morals, and the life of the age amid which it would have to pick its way, it is probable that no man would have been daring enough to attempt to write it; and therefore, if it had to be written at

all, the task could only have been undertaken by a lady.

Mrs Leo had also had a slight misunderstanding with Lady Marlowe. It had happened in this way :

The two ladies had met at an ice-shop, where even Mrs Leo occasionally condescended to refresh herself.

Mrs Leo, whenever she was eating ices (and she was extremely fond of them), felt that she was, to a certain extent, giving a hostage to feminine weakness ; and in order to counteract this attitude in the eyes of the world, she always on such occasions assumed her most defensive and divinely arrogant air.

Lady Marlowe, on the other hand, was always prepared to cultivate anybody and everybody. She had come over to Mrs Leo's table, and had begun to chatter to her about various things, not feeling in the least disconcerted by the replies that she had received being entirely monosyllabic in their character. At last she had asked her about the Fabian Society, of which Mrs Leo was a leading member, and Mrs Leo had answered that probably Lady Marlowe was incapable of understanding either their motives or methods. In reply to a further ques-

tion, Mrs Leo had stated that they all sat round a room and denounced the awful tyranny and degradation of capital, and longed for the day when they should have a real Commune in London. At this Lady Marlowe had been unable entirely to restrain her sense of the ludicrous; and Mrs Leo, being unable to restrain her temper, had said, "You are just the sort of woman that I should have expected to ridicule all efforts for the advancement of her sex." Lady Marlowe, still retaining her temper, had laughed outright at this uncouth retort. She had, however, inquired, as Mrs Leo was leaving the shop, whether the wicked report was true which said that any person whose manners were even conventionally good was ineligible for membership.

After this event Mrs Leo refused to speak to any one with whom she had not what she called "spiritual sympathy." And it ended in her speaking to no one. But she, who was superior to most things, was certainly superior to any inconvenience caused by an absence of conversation. As she herself used to declare, "I can't understand people who say that they find it so hard to do right. I have no difficulty at all. I have no temptations."

The day for their departure to Sienna had been fixed, when Mrs Leo became extremely unwell, and after a day or two it was pronounced to be low fever. Already several people had suffered from feverish attacks; for the truth is, that when Pompeii was planned sufficient attention had not been given to the drainage. In all other respects it had exceeded the most sanguine hopes of its promoters. It had been a great international success; and if it had not been kept quite as select as some had hoped that it would be, others had, on the other hand, found it proportionally amusing.

The London season was now beginning. Many of the English were preparing to start homewards. In two or three weeks they would all have flown. The *coupés lits* on the Northern trains were engaged for many days in advance. But in spite of the English winging their way to London, it did not seem as though their passage would have any eclipsing effect on the constant festivities of the place. French and Italians, Germans and Russians, kept still arriving, and it appeared probable that many of them would remain on through the early part of the summer.

It was such a lovely little place, embosomed in the soft seductive scenery of that Southern shore. The life was so free, so varied, so delightful. "It was almost as good as being at college again," Claud declared in a moment of enthusiasm. There were such charming people from every country—the sea was so fresh, the air so balmy, and (as some people said) Monte Carlo so conveniently near—that it was no wonder English people lingered on rather than hurry home to face the struggle of "the season"; or that foreigners, having just despatched their own, should hasten here for change and relaxation.

One of the last events in which the English were to take part was to be a grand entertainment organised by Mr Smythe. It was to consist of one or two little comediettas and an imitation music-hall entertainment. A fear was expressed that some of the foreigners might think the latter somewhat vulgar; but Mr Smythe reassured them with the information that a real music-hall entertainment had been given at the New Club with the greatest success, and before the most select of audiences. Miss van Knut and Darlington were

to play in a little piece called "During Family Prayers." Two young people who are staying in a country house come down to breakfast, and finding that the door is shut and prayers have begun, they are constrained to wait outside on the mat. The young man is in love with the young lady, but he is diffident, she is an heiress; and this, his last morning in the house, has arrived without his having had the courage to propose. They talk about indifferent subjects, and chaff one another; just at the last moment he, listening at the key-hole, says, "They are beginning the last prayer."

She replies, "The servants will be out in a moment."

Then he makes his offer. The young lady hesitates. He drops on his knees. Prayers are over. The door opens.

She whispers "Yes"; and turning to the invisible company within the room, says, by way of explanation, "We in the hall have also been having our family prayers."

It was a little piece which depended more on the brightness of its dialogue than on its action. It was very pleasant, however, when well played; and

there seemed every likelihood that it would have justice done it on this occasion.

The rehearsals were now going on every day. After the event in the orange-orchard, Darlington was inclined to sulk. But Miss van Knut was determined that the performance should take place as though nothing had happened.

The music-hall entertainment, which included a Christy-minstrel performance, was being organised by the men, and the smoking-rooms were nightly filled with members humming their songs and talking over their "business."

The smoking-rooms at all times were a pleasant rendezvous in the late evening hours. Crossing the dark deserted Forum, with the sudden breath of coolness and the calm still evening sky above, always recalled to Claud a tender memory of his college days—days when he used to saunter to some friend's rooms across the old familiar "quod," which seemed more venerable and still more romantic under the night's enhancing charm, and so plunge in a moment into the midst of all the light, and warmth, and gaiety, and hospitable brightness of old panelled rooms, that echoed out

into the listening gardens the laughter, and the fitful chatter, and the songs of a snug party of congenial men, immersed in all the known delights of flannel *blazers* and most comfortable attitudes, and over all of whom a thin blue cloud of soothing smoke hovered perpetually.

On this particular occasion Claud did not encourage his memory to lull itself with dreams of Oxford, nor did he remain in the smoking-room. He went on till he came to a large *loggia* which looked across the water, and had been built for outdoor smoking in fine weather.

It was one of the prettiest nooks in the whole place. Delicate marble pillars supported a frescoed ceiling, and rested on a darkly tinted floor of quaint mosaic, that led out on to a broad delightful terrace rising directly from the tideless sea. The walls were frescoed. Classical scenes loomed forth in tones and colours which were subdued into a perfect harmony. A copy of the little Neapolitan Narcissus shone out in grey-green bronze, standing upon his pedestal with all the gallant grace of antique boyhood. Another pedestal was crowned with a slim lamp, after a Roman pattern,

whose tiny flame was dedicated to our latter-day cigars and cigarettes. This, and the numerous extremely comfortable chairs that stood about, appeared to limit the concessions that had been made to our degenerate age. But these concessions were at the present moment in extreme request.

Most of the chairs were occupied, and everybody was smoking. The conversation of the company was sufficiently informal and fragmentary to proclaim that the majority of the speakers belonged to our nation, and were at the present moment completely at their ease. The talk, indeed, was absolutely fitful and inconsequent. It came in small disjointed phrases and then lapsed, supplanted in most instances by an eloquent and conclusive puff of smoke. Out on the terrace Portland had arranged his handsome person in a chair, and, leaning back with half-closed eyes, he seemed, if possible, more languidly content, more gracefully inert, than ever.

Perhaps this habitual attitude was a little emphasised by the insistive presence of Mr Gradley, for that gentleman was boring him extremely by trying to get an article out of him on the campaign in the Soudan.

"Now couldn't you," said Mr Gradley, in his most insinuating tones—"now couldn't you let us have something on the subject?"

"But I don't know anything about it," responded Portland, in his sweet, low, inexpressive voice.

"You've been there," continued Mr Gradley. "You might write me a little thing from quite a new point of view. You needn't sign the article if you would rather not. And then you might write from the point of view of a private, or of a correspondent, or of an enlightened subaltern adversely criticising the whole affair from the standpoint of his superior experience and technical knowledge. You might even write as a Canadian boatman or an Egyptian camel-driver."

"My dear chap, I couldn't," said Portland, becoming colloquial in his quiescent impatience. "All I know about the whole affair is, that I sat all day for weeks in a stinking boat—that is, when we hadn't to get out and haul the thing over rapids. And then I was shoved on a beastly camel and jolted across the desert, where we couldn't even wash. After a day or two we killed a lot of awfully fine black chaps, who nearly did

for us. And then I got enteric fever, and managed to get home on leave."

The arrival of Claud at this moment gave Mr Gradley an opportunity to retire, for he saw that any further efforts were useless.

"Been doing anything to-day?" said Portland, in a tone which showed that the words were intended as an interjection rather than an interrogative.

"Trying to learn a song," said Claud, while he toyed with his cigar. "They've asked me to sing a thing, in a suit of 'dittos,' called 'I'm the chap that mashes Lottie.' I haven't the faintest idea what the thing's about."

"Oh, I should think you'd do it all right."

There was a pause, and both young men smoked on in absolute content. The night was still and beautiful. The sky seemed luminous, although there was no moon. Innumerable stars rained down a glitter, or veiled their faces in a twining scarf of Milky Way. The vague immeasurable spaces of the sea sank far away into the deep mysterious distances of solemn darkness. The tiny waves spent themselves lapping on the neighbouring steps with a monotonously drowsy whisper.

Claud let his thoughts pass onward to the future. How should he reconcile Mrs Denbigh to his love? How should he win again his old place in his uncle's heart? Suppose he hurried back to London, and plunged into his work with diligence, redoubled in addition to renewed. Would he be happier, toiling on through the long terms, perhaps for nothing—perhaps for a success which, when it came, would only hold a barren satisfaction? For if we do not take a pleasure in our work for that work's sake; if we struggle with distasteful occupation in order to procure some ultimate, much-coveted position or attainment,—when it is gained, it will be found to be but a hollow recompense. Ambition will continue to make its presence felt, and all the fierce desire for an expected happiness will still hang like an enticing rainbow, always a little way beyond our reach.

And then the vision of his dusty chambers filled Claud's mind, illuminated by the pallid light of apprehension. He seemed to see the very panes of glass that wanted washing, whose thin obscuring veil of gradually perpetuated fog would throw a still more sombre light upon those rows of endless

law reports that grimly ranged themselves in austere decoration; upon the musty documents imprisoned in their dull red tape; upon the chill pervading air of legal study. The future seemed to loom before him through the medium of those darkening panes. The years would slip by; if the briefs came with increasing quickness, the years would only pass the sooner. The one demure and silent clerk would register their passage by a gradually deepening wrinkle, a stray grey hair, an imperceptibly increasing stoop beneath the ever heavier pressure of Time's silent hand. Claud was not precisely morbid, but he was extremely susceptible to all the conditions, both adverse and favourable, of his environment. His mind was so highly strung as to be almost painfully sensitive in its responses to surrounding facts. He felt small passing trifles—a face, a voice, a momentary incident—to be either sympathetic or antipathetic. And in the governing of his actions, his instincts and emotions contributed the lion's share of motive. Indeed such influence had they over the springs of thought and movement, that when he mastered his intuitive desires, thwarted his impulses, and

made concessions to the voice of duty, they showed a tendency to neutralise and render barren the desired result. Yet, in spite of all this subtle resonance of nature, this delicate discrimination of appreciation and dislike, he had a judgment which was both reliable and singularly clear from all illusion. A vivid sense of humour came to the aid of a large stock of native common-sense, and thus enabled him both to perceive and fight against his weaknesses. If he ever yielded to them, he always realised that the submission was made with open eyes.

But as he sometimes said (the sentence is characteristic both of his humour and of his attitude towards his own personal nature)—“True happiness may be occasionally found in the audacity of knowing distinctly what your duty is, and then *not doing it.*”

He now suddenly rose up to the surface of affairs from his plunge into these reveries about the future. He was recalled by nothing more than the extinction of his cigar, and indicated his return to consciousness by asking Portland for a light; then added, by way of giving tongue to some

unformed ideas that were still lingering in his brain—

“Don’t you hate people with pale worn faces, and irritable, overwrought, over-developed minds and brains?”

“I must say I like some flesh and blood about a chap. Besides, those sapping people bore one so. But I’m very liberal-minded myself,” added Portland, with an air of princely magnanimity. “I don’t bar intellectual people, so long as they keep their intellect out of their conversation.”

Redburn and Darlington came up and settled themselves in chairs near the others. Claud made his presence felt by shying cigarettes at Darlington, for at the present moment he felt particularly flippant after his momentary dalliance with a foreboding future.

Darlington quietly collected them and filled his case, with the remark that if Claud liked to keep him in cigarettes by making him a target, he didn’t care.

“‘I’m the chap that mashes Lottie ;
I’m a Piccadilly toff,’”

hummed Claud to himself.

"My dear boy, what are you singing?" asked Redburn.

"It's a kind of song I've promised to sing at this concert."

"It sounds rather drivelling."

"You'd think it still more drivelling if you heard the whole of it. What the foreigners will think of us, I don't know. Luckily they won't understand much about it."

"That reminds me," cried Darlington, "that I must learn my part. Would you mind hearing me? there's a good fellow," he said to Redburn. And pulling out his book from his pocket, he began—

"*'Enter JACK (stops and looks through the keyhole). Just my luck. They've begun family prayers, and I am once more doomed—doomed to spend a dreary quarter of an hour upon this mat. To-day—to-day——'*" he hesitated.

"*'I take my departure,'*" prompted Redburn.

"*'I take my departure, without, alas! having declared my love.'* It's such awful rot, you know!" broke out Darlington in the midst of his part. "A fellow never talks like that."

Redburn assured him that on the stage such language is expected, and that at the present moment he must not criticise his part, but try to learn it. So Darlington returned to the recital, and his voice was heard monotonously making the most passionate appeals in a rapid and disjointed undertone.

“Who is that Johnnie over there?—one of your mangy sort, I should say,” asked Portland, indicating Mr Leo, who had been discoursing with the discouraged Mr Gradley.

“Hush, Bertie! he’ll hear you,” replied Claud, as Mr Leo made his way towards them. He came up, and, sitting on the balustrade, began to talk to them. Mr Leo was a man who could talk extremely well when he chose, and now he indulged them in some of his brilliant paradoxes.

He maintained, for instance, that pain is only an intensified form of pleasure—that they are opposed to each other, not in nature but only in degree, in the same way that cold is merely a relative form of heat. He then proceeded to inform them that vice is virtue out of harmony with its surroundings; and that as dirt is but useful matter in the wrong place, so sin is nothing more than misplaced good-

ness. They acquiesced instead of arguing with his statements. They both imagined that he was simply talking for amusement or effect; but they were too lazy to take up the cudgels of orthodoxy, in case they should be wrong, and he should be really expounding some of his numerous views.

"You are rather transcendental," said Claud, by way of a conclusion.

"You're only trying to 'draw' us," added Bertie, unsympathetically.

"I must plead guilty to being a Platonist," said Mr Leo, loftily. "And with my master I therefore tend to be a transcendentalist."

"And we are 'Sporting-Timeists,'" put in Bertie, with a brutal disregard for any seriousness remaining.

Claud remarked that many people seemed inclined to become theoretical, ideal, about the future. "Even Miss Rattletubs," he said, "with all her little plans and schemes, would probably call herself a Platonist—if she understood what it meant."

"She has more ability than one might give her credit for," said Mr Leo, leaning back and looking up starwards. "I find that she writes a good deal for the press."

Portland just opened his lips and slipped out 'The Queen.'

"No, not 'The Queen,'" responded Mr Leo. "She writes in the living press. She wrote that extremely interesting article, for instance, on 'Autonomy for India' in the 'Morning Gazette.'"

Light leapt to Claud's eyes as the blood leapt to his brain.

"How do you know?" With one burst of breath he asked the question.

"She told me so herself," said Mr Leo, with perfect quietness and matter-of-fact simplicity.

For a moment a buzzing in Claud's ears had overcome all other sounds, and every sense of colour had left his eyes, as it leaves the eyes of one who is about to faint.

Now it surged back upon an upward rush of joy. Everything seemed lit up by far more luminous and brilliant colours than reality can ever give. He heard Darlington's voice solemnly reciting, "O child, child, do not trifle with a strong man's heart!" Redburn's replying, "That's not the way to say it;" and Darlington's resumption of, "Oh do NOT trifle with a strong man's heart!" Then all

his feelings burst upon the air in a delighted little laugh.

“What’s the joke now?” asked Bertie.

But Claud could only answer that he laughed because the night was beautiful and he was happy. For sudden happiness like his takes up its abode and nestles itself near the heart in various ways and with diverse expressions. Welcomed as a stranger or as a familiar guest, it does not pause to fret itself about the method of its utterance; it mates instinctively the sad young soul, and both are joined as in a marriage made in heaven, without one fear of severance, one alien thought.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AND now we come to a sad and shameful page of our story, which it were best to pass over quickly.

For its development requires a false and almost libellous assumption. It is necessary that we suppose the Prime Minister (at the time of which we are writing) to have been capable of declaring a policy so shameless and so ruinous, that even his own party were aghast; and honest, honourable, and independent members of that party were forced to publicly denounce it.

Now if we were to have invented a policy which was only a little base, only indirectly unjust and remotely injurious, we might have been fairly accused of making a spiteful caricature, a malicious perversion.

We will therefore avoid doing this. We will

suppose something so horrible, so equally opposed to every profession and principle of either party, so injurious to England, ruinous to Ireland, and destructive to the empire, *as to be impossible of belief*. In a word, we will assume the Premier's scheme to be a Home Rule Government for Ireland.

We have felt less reluctance in inventing a monstrosity like this, because no one for a moment can possibly be deceived into believing that such a scheme for the betrayal of their country could ever have been endorsed by the great Liberal party.

An idea so absolutely fantastic and so ludicrously inconceivable as this, is harmless.

We have passed, when we suggest such actions, far from the controversial planes of politics to immaterial realms where irresponsible imagination holds playful sway.

No one—not even a Liberal himself—can cavil at a fancy which boldly claims to be fictitious and impossible. Indeed this apology is hardly necessary when we remember the consistent conduct of their party—how justly and how sternly they rebuked the Tories at a late election for *permitting*

the Irish to vote for them; when we recall the words and actions of their leader — our late great and good Prime Minister,—how scornfully and how persistently he always has condemned all pandering to Irish disaffection, and passionately denounced everything tending to the weakening of the Union.

Do we not recollect his memorable words (at least we Tories do, for some Liberals appear to have forgotten them): “Can any sensible man, can any rational man, suppose at this time of day, in this condition of the world, we are going to disintegrate the great capital institution of this country, for the purpose of making ourselves ridiculous in the sight of all mankind, and crippling any power we possess for bestowing benefits through legislation on the country to which we belong?”

Only last autumn were we not strengthened by his scathing words of indignation against any who might threaten the United Kingdom with disruption?—

“Every man, woman, and child amongst us is convinced that it is the will of Providence that these islands should be bound together as a United

Kingdom ; and from one end of Great Britain to the other, I trust there will not be a single representative returned to Parliament who for one moment would listen to any proposition tending to impair, visibly and sensibly impair, the unity of the empire."

And with these noble words still ringing in our ears, I do not think that there is any fear of our mistaking this light fiction for recorded fact—of our confounding the base, destructive, treacherous Minister who has been for the moment conjured up to suit the exigencies of our story, with the enlightened statesman who has ruled over us, and whose grand and patriotic sentiments we have just quoted.

Having thus firmly established our fiction, and proved it to be a fiction so satisfactorily, we may now proceed to develop it. But if any reader is anxious to know more about the nature of the Bill, about its details and "the lines" on which it is supposed "to run," the author is afraid that he cannot satisfy any curiosity concerning this unnatural creation of his brain, as his imagination is far from unlimited in the sphere where such an

inconceivably base Government may be supposed to dwell.

The reader must therefore be content with supposing that even Mr Cade left the Cabinet rather than support such a measure, and that it was equally opposed by all the leaders of both parties.

Lord St Kevan was amazed and dumfounded. There is hardly a word in the language strong enough to express his feelings. Every faith, every belief, every tradition of his lifetime seemed to have been swept away. He felt as he would have felt had he awoke one morning and found that two and two made five, or had been requested by his own servants to black their boots and carry up their coals for them. Numerous other friends of his, in the same plight, called on him, and gave vent to their feelings in their most expressively characteristic ways. It was this that prevented his wondering if he had lost his head, and convinced him that at any rate the Premier must have lost his.

The awakening was terrible. The shock of knowing that a Liberal Prime Minister was capable of such treachery was not so great, because he had long suspected that the Premier was capable

of *almost* anything. For him, it was the realisation that such an infamous scheme should have been permitted for a moment by the rest of the Cabinet, by influential Whigs, by anybody for any time, which was so bitter.

He suddenly knew, as truth is sometimes flashed upon us in a sheet of fire by an overwhelming catastrophe, that the right government of England by trained, enlightened, and experienced statesmen, born of great families, with all the strength of mind and breadth of view which privilege bestows, is doomed.

The Whigs have been too long unconscious, lulled to sleep in the Delilah arms of the Democracy. They have boasted that their strength is in their principles, their policy, their statesmanship; and once, twice, thrice they have risen up triumphant, but still have not lost faith in their Delilah. At length Democracy has soothed them once again, and once too often, into the realms of fatuous slumber; and now they wake affrighted and too late—wake to realise that Democracy has robbed them of their strength, and that in the nearest future they may have to grind in the Phil-

istine's prison-house, bound with the brazen fetters of the caucus.

Thoughts somewhat like these were Lord St Kevan's. He suddenly realised the anomaly of belonging to a party all of whose measures he individually disapproved of. And although he did not admit it to himself, he had been in his heart a little piqued at the neglect which the party seemed to have shown him during the last few years.

It gradually dawned upon him, as a resisted and unpleasant fact eats its way into recognition, that if he wished to assume a really logical position, he ought to leave his party and become a Conservative.

The wrench for such a man would be terrible. Uprooted from every belief and tradition which had nourished him through life, and which had formed the soil where he had grown and flourished, he would now find himself transplanted to an alien shore; he would be compelled to take the nutriment of fresh ideas, imbibe new springs of conduct, accept surroundings strangely unfamiliar.

He talked over his position, his attitude, with

other men in whom he placed complete reliance and confidence.

"It is not I that am leaving my party," he used to say, "but our party which are leaving—which have left us."

"I don't see that our becoming Conservatives will in any way help to prevent the Prime Minister's ruining the country," said the Duke of Oxford, who had a clear perception of facts, and an uncompromising way of bringing them forward when perceived.

Lord St Kevan replied that he did not suppose that in these days such a movement on their part would make any material difference, or help to arrest the downward rush towards anarchy and ruin; but that, for himself, such a change would make him feel more comfortable, more at his ease. He could not help almost regarding himself as a traitor to his party, while he still belonged to it, and yet so disapproved of all its later conduct that in his heart he knew he wished success to its rivals, and hoped that it would fail.

He had, as we know, a delicate sense of honour, an extreme conscientiousness about all the relations

of life. His aristocratic nature shrank from a false position; and if he believed that the position included its share of meanness, there was no sacrifice he would not make in order to avoid adopting it.

Therefore he decided that for him the more honourable course would be to make the announcement that he had finally severed his connection with the Liberal party.

And now the reader will see why we were compelled to invent our little Home Rule infamy. It was necessary that Lord St Kevan should be driven out of his party; and this could only have been done by the invention of a supposititious policy, as base, as monstrous, and as shamelessly faithless as this one would be. We have frankly acknowledged it to be a foundationless fiction; and therefore no one can say we insinuate that such an idea could ever have been really entertained or acted on by either party.

At Pompeii the news was received with much surprise. Claud was astonished. He had believed that the inherent and inherited Whiggism in his uncle's blood would have been sufficiently sturdy

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to withstand even this shock. He wondered what effect it would have on the relationship in which they stood to one another. He determined to wait until his uncle should break silence. Besides which, at the present moment one thought alone filled his brain. He must see Miss Rattletubs, and learn if she were really responsible for the fatal article.

He found her giving away tracts (in Italian) on "The Social Science of the Day" to some little peasant children on the beach.

She welcomed him with one of her concise, inclusive smiles.

"Really, Mr Brownlow," she said, "you're quite a stranger. I am summoned home. I have to help at Exeter Hall in May, and they have asked me to speak on the approaching end of the world at the Mildmay Conference."

"How long do you give it?" asked Claud, giving her a moment's respite to pour forth her newly reserved ideas before he approached his own subject.

"Fifteen years," she answered promptly.

"Now I always put it at eighteen years," said naughty Claud.

“Do tell me how you arrive at that. By what argument, by what convincing argument, do you prove it to be eighteen?”

“Same way as your people prove it to be fifteen,—by a method of ingenious guess-work.”

Miss Rattletubs was pained at this levity. She assured him that most of the earnest seekers in the Revelation, and the leading modern authorities on prophecy, had come to the solemn conclusion that it was fifteen. “I myself,” she went on glibly, “have made some further researches. ‘The little book’ which has to be swallowed, but which is afterwards bitter, is the Home Rule Bill. The two witnesses who are *expressly* told to leave out the court of the Temple for the Gentiles, are obviously our noble Premier and our Irish Secretary. If any one would injure them, does not fire proceed out of their mouths and destroy their enemies? and have they not the power (by forcing Ireland into civil war) ‘to smite the earth with plagues as often as they will’? Next, the beast ascends and makes war against them and overcomes them—that is, they are defeated. But soon they come to life again (return to office), they

stand upon their feet, they are triumphant. Now I will prove to you," she continued, with increasing gusto, "who the beast is who overthrew the witnesses. We are told that he had seven heads—obviously, the seven *Churches*,—and ten horns with seven crowns—obviously, seven *hills*; besides which, he had the name of blasphemy upon his heads. The name of blasphemy is of course Rome, and Rome has seven hills. The dragon (who I greatly fear is the late Lord Beaconsfield) gave him his power, and his seat, and his great authority. You remember that the people worshipped both the dragon and the beast. Then the other beast that came out of the earth, we have decided, is the Primrose League, the two horns being the two words 'Imperium et Libertas.' The second beast forced every one to worship the first beast, and forced every one, small and great, rich and poor, to wear a mark in their right hands or on their foreheads,—merely, of course, a poetical phrase for button-hole. Now about the number 666. There must come a moment when the League has exactly 666 habitations, and at that moment the prophecy will be completely fulfilled. That is

the only reason," she added naively, "why I am anxious for the League to spread."

"I always understood that 'the beast' was supposed to be Nero," said Claud.

"Nero! Absurd! Why, where would be the interest of identifying current events, and being able to foretell future ones, if the beast had been Nero?"

"That is just what I suppose all commentators have felt," answered Claud, a little crushingly; "because each generation of them, for the last eighteen hundred years, has always tried to claim 'the beast' as a contemporary, and has generally succeeded in proving his identity with some contemporary enemy."

"Yes; but then, in this instance, as we are right, they must be wrong."

Whenever Miss Rattletubs "felt warm" about a subject, she was accustomed to expect her auditors to accept her statements as proofs. She considered that nowadays young men were too sceptical in their crotchets, too cavilling in their reception of authorised information.

"And now, Miss Rattletubs, what I have really

come to trouble you about is a rumour I have heard that you wrote an article on Cade's opinions about India in the 'Morning Gazette.'" Claud was going on to explain why he was asking such an inquisitive question, when Miss Rattletubs interrupted him by at once acknowledging that she was the authoress.

He saw the clouds rolling back before his future, and welcomed the coming sunshine.

"I have been accused of betraying a secret—a more or less State secret," he said. "I was supposed to have been the only person who knew what was said at the interview. I have been unable to clear myself, because I did repeat its substance to one person—a lady; and though I was sure that she repeated nothing, yet I could not of course find out who had written the article, and so prove myself innocent."

"I had no idea it was a secret. Mrs Denbigh told me about it, I think," she answered lightly.

"Mrs Denbigh!" Each link of the chain was in his hand.

"I was talking Cade over with Mrs Denbigh. She was calling him a dangerous man. I was

standing up for him. Then she repeated to me what M. Courier had told her, in order to convince me. I of course was delighted. Home Rule for India is just what we want. They say that if the poor Indians were once independent, they would abolish all their heathen customs, and zenanas, and nautch-girls, and all unite together to form a great kingdom like England. And we didn't know at that time that the Prime Minister was in favour of Home Rule for Ireland, because he had just declared that he was absolutely opposed to it."

"Cade used to speak as though he were in favour of Home Rule for Ireland; but now even he can't swallow the present Bill."

"He'll have to give in to us in the end," said Miss Rattletubs, with her cheerful habitual assumption of omniscience; "and they say that he isn't what he was—he hasn't as much power as he used to have in Radical circles. I wrote the article in the 'Morning Gazette' to show that he was really sticking to his principles. I had a conversation with M. Courier, and got the details out of him. One has to use a little tact about those things, you know."

"Thank you so much! Then you really think that you have moved a step in the direction of autonomy?"

"I am sure of it."

"You may yet give valuable assistance to the fulfilment of prophecy," Claud could not help adding, though he was afraid that his companion might regard his suggestion as intentionally humorous, and therefore perhaps a little profane. The thought of doing so, however, never for a moment occurred to her earnest and literal mind.

"I am sure I hope so," she said cheerfully. "I always do my very best, whenever I see my way clearly, to help it in any way. I think we all ought to do that."

"Well," said Claud, as he saw that she was preparing to take her departure, "I am awfully obliged to you for having acknowledged the article." And then he asked if he might use the information he had gained. His companion assured him that she had not the least objection to his telling anybody. She picked up her little hand-bag, which always accompanied her, gave Claud her hand, and was gone.

Claud took a long walk. He wanted a quiet time to think over his affairs. He was determined that he would have everything prepared before he again spoke to Mrs Denbigh. This time nothing should be left to chance; he would not be again discomfited. Should he write to his uncle, or speak to Mrs Denbigh first? He sat down on the shore and threw pebbles at the waves. The afternoon was very warm. He pulled off his clothes and tumbled himself into the sea. The bracing cold of the water seemed to do his heart good. He found a rock from which he could take "headers," and plunged again and again into the liquid depths of the encircling ocean. At last he scrambled out, and throwing himself at full length on the adaptable comforting sand, he warmed in the sunshine, languidly piled up the neighbouring shingle into a little heap, and encouraged his mind to make itself up in favour of writing to his uncle at once.

He was awakened from this perfectly and refreshingly childish operation by Redburn's voice.

"Please keep still," it pleaded, "I am putting you into a study."

"*A hint in nudity and sand*, I should think," called out Claud.

"Don't ridicule my style, you wretch! Don't jeer at my life's work! It will just be a vague and delicious suggestion of colour. Pale-pinkish limbs against pale-yellow sand; a brown head for the highest point in the picture, which will be framed in greenish gilt: there you have it. I really think I must get Lord St Kevan to buy it."

"Call it what you like, so long as you don't say it's a portrait of me," cried Claud, beginning to find his way into his clothes.

"All right, old chap."

They walked back together. Claud was in the highest spirits. And when Redburn assured him that he was in rather a childish state of mind that afternoon, he admitted the fact, and excused himself by assuring his companion that for once he really felt almost irresponsible for his actions.

"Not drunk, I hope?" said Redburn, humorously.

"No; jolly. An afternoon like this makes one in love with living. After all, whatever Democracy does, it can't deprive us of the sunshine, and the sea, and our bathes on the shore."

"I'm not so sure about the bathes. Bathing will probably be found to be contrary to some by-law or other; and you'll be prosecuted for a misdemeanour."

Claud's energy was not even then exhausted. He got a boat, and took Redburn out for a pull.

The same evening he wrote a long letter to his uncle, explaining everything, and enclosing a scrap of paper which Miss Rattletubs had cheerfully given him—she was really extremely good-natured—and which duly acknowledged her responsibility for the fatal article.

After this he went down to the room where the rehearsals were being held. He sang his song with considerable *brio* and dash. Then he sat himself down to witness the comedietta in which Miss van Knut and Darlington were to distinguish themselves. They played it with becoming seriousness, till they reached the point where Darlington had to seize her hand and murmur, "O child, child, it is bitter, bitter! Do not trifle with a strong man's heart!" He gave this forth with such portentously solemn emphasis, and in such an appallingly

tragical attitude, that Miss van Knut burst out laughing.

"You're not to laugh. You spoil it all," cried Darlington, with his words caught up in a little gust of temper.

"I guess that's quite a little too fresh," she said, still laughing.

"I don't care if it's fresh or not. It's in the book, and I mean to say it."

"I don't care if it's in the book or not," retorted his companion; "if you say it in that tone of voice, I shall laugh right away."

"If you do, that'll be the right way to spoil the piece. I must say it in that way, because I can't say it in any other." Darlington was becoming obstinate.

"Then the piece will be spoilt," said Eliza, with a sudden assumption of dignity.

"Yes, by you," answered Darlington, stalking out of the room at a pace which was calculated to secure him the retention of "the last word."

"And now," said Mr Smythe, "Madame la Duchesse de Rochfort will be kind enough to give us her imitation of a French farmyard."

CHAPTER XIX.

TIME with Claud during the next few days flew by, winged partly by his happiness and partly by a tiny residue of dread about the coming interview. He had to pacify, not “score off,” the mother of his love. He was sure that she had entirely forgotten her talk with Miss Rattletubs, and that she had not the faintest idea that she herself was responsible for the publication of the report. How would she take the information? In order to show her that he was innocent, he would have to prove to her that she was guilty; unconsciously and unintentionally guilty doubtless, but at the same time guilty of the very act for which she had so severely censured him. Would she be generous—or even just enough—he wondered, to give him all the benefit of the situation, and to render to him the

justification which was his due? He longed for the interview to be over. He watched Mrs Denbigh as she moved about in her beautiful dresses, calm and collected, with all the unconscious assurance of inviolate virtue; and his dread increased.

He boated and bathed. He played lawn-tennis, and wandered away across the olive-coated hills, in long, delightful, solitary walks. He even tried one morning to perpetrate another sonnet, but was surprised in the midst of the second line by the appearance of Miss van Knut. She was also taking a lonely walk, and was delighted to have lit upon a companion.

"When are you off for England?" she asked.

"Soon," he answered, not knowing how soon it might be.

"Won't it be real lovely to be in London?" she exclaimed.

And then, as they walked back together, they became almost confidential on the subject of Mrs Denbigh. Miss van Knut did not hesitate to express her scorn of that lady; but Claud was sufficiently circumspect only to admit that he thought

her very complete, and a wonderfully maternal mother.

"You are all so frightfully docile in Europe," broke in Miss van Knut with sudden petulance.

"Are we?"

"Yes, to your surroundings, conventions, status."

"In a word, to the suitable."

"Even people like Mr Leo come here because it's so suitable."

"But even you wouldn't come here because it's unsuitable," Claud retorted. "By the way, have you heard that Mrs Leo is really ill with typhoid?"

"Yes; and several other people have got it also. Papa says the place isn't properly drained. And he's a great authority; for, you know, we live on a drain."

"On a drain?"

"In New York. I guess that's how pa got his money." Then she suddenly changed the topic of their talk. "Haven't you got an elder brother?"

"I've got a brother Bob. He's shooting lions in Africa."

"And I suppose he's the boss of the family?"

"Of course. He comes into the title and all that. I'm nobody."

“Well, it makes me feel just mad,” said Miss van Knut, with decision.

“Why?” asked Claud, coming to the aid of his order.

“That one brother should have more honour and money and position than another, simply because he was born first.”

“Well, you see, after all it is better that one brother should have it than neither, which is what would practically happen in the long-run if both were equal.”

“Oh, you’re a Conservative!” said Miss van Knut, with delightful contemptuousness.

“Darlington would say the same—or at any rate think the same—though he’s a Liberal.”

“I don’t call him a bit of a Liberal,” she said with emphasis.

“But he is. I’ve tried to convert him, but it’s no use. He has official Whiggism in his blood—inherited from a long line of ancestors. All I can get out of him is, ‘They’re a rum lot; but we’ve always been Whig, and had something in the Government—and *I’m* not going to change.’”

“Bah! you’re all alike.” And they reached the

gate before they could settle the abstract rights of inheritance.

At last one morning Lord St Kevan's letter arrived. It was almost as long as one of those letters of his to the 'Times,' which used to come forth to the world on the middle page, arrayed in large type and "leaded" columns. It chiefly dealt with the reasons which had induced him to join the Conservative party. It was so full and detailed as to almost become his *apologia*. Its explicitness was touching. It seemed to ring with the sadness of a recantation. It did not allude to Claud's letter until it had fully explained Lord St Kevan's position, and then it said—

"Need I tell you that I am as delighted as you can be at the proof of your innocence. As you know, I never believed that you were guilty of betraying a secret imparted in confidence—at the worst, I feared that it had leaked out through your indiscretion; but what to me was so terrible was your inability to *prove* yourself innocent. If you still think that I did you an unconscious wrong, I know you will forgive me, for in this world of

ours, so full of both equivocal intention and doubtful motive, we all are liable to make mistakes and even fatal errors, with the best and the most honest of intentions; and therefore we should be, I think, as ready to grant forgiveness as to ask for it. I hear that there will probably be an early dissolution. The Home Rule Bill will probably be thrown out in the Commons,—certainly out in the Lords,—and it will give me great pleasure if you will stand as the Conservative candidate for our Division of the county. Let me know your wishes as soon as possible, and believe me your affectionate uncle,

“ST KEVAN.”

“Dear old uncle!” Claud said, as he finished reading the letter. “How he must have felt leaving his party! Has he resigned at Brooks’s, I wonder?—Brooks’s, where he used to go and plan out his party’s campaign, and draw up those lists of the Cabinet which we used to find lying about when we were boys. It is hard to realise that he has really held office in three Liberal Governments—events change so fast. Perhaps it will soon be hard to realise that any enlightened and independ-

ent statesman ever held office in a British Cabinet at any time.

But although Claud tried to think of his uncle as we try to force our delighted selves to think of the giver when some treasure of happiness comes to us from another, he could find no room in his heart for anything but the joy-bringing words that flashed to his soul from the concluding lines of the letter.

Really to stand for Parliament at last—and for his own Division, his own native Division! He saw himself hedged with exciting incidents and absorbing interests. He could picture himself hurrying along, heading the canvassing party, dropping in and out of the various cottages, laying siege to the labourers with argument or jest, and winning over the wives—Claud was sure of the wives—by a little playful flattery, and bribing kisses discreetly distributed among the babies. He knew that every one on and around his uncle's estate would vote for him. Their affection for him was such, that they would almost feel insulted if he did not take their support of him as much for granted as they did themselves. He had lived amongst them all

his life. When he was quite a small chap he used to spend half the long days—those long, long days of childhood, so comfortable and so quiet that they come to seem almost endless—among the labourers in the fields. He used to ride on the plough in early autumn, which turned over the fragrant earth so solemnly, and watch the great, good, patient horses toiling beside the pink-cheeked farmer's boy, who filled the child's small heart with envious ambition by an enormous and delightful whip he cracked continually. Sometimes he wandered with the keepers through the wet plantations and saw the pheasants fed, and, when he grew a little older (it must be admitted), shot them. One day the men showed him a fox's earth: he gazed at it with reverence, and wondered if he could not have a little fox for a tame playfellow. So his delight may be imagined when his next birthday brought him a woolly cub, which soon came to exact a share of the love devoted before wholly to his pony. There was not a cottage in the village down by the mill-stream where he was not sure of welcome, and where he would not find the tea and thick enticing bread-and-butter brought

out to do him honour. And thus the slow years passed, made up of an interminable string of calm and lovely days. As he grew older, school and college claimed him; but he came back each holiday—grown handsomer and taller, the people always said, as soon as they caught sight of his bright face and winning smile.

The peaceful days of summer could not lengthen themselves so as to hold all the various things there were to do; while in the winter he would wander far with his gun over the crackling leaves, beneath the brown and leafless branches, on days which came between those most exciting days of all, when there was hunting, and his favourite horse carried him, as on wings, across the country. The very clink of his spurs as he came down-stairs to breakfast gave him a little thrill of pleasure. And when he felt the warmth of coat, the clasp of breeches, and caught his pink reflection in the tall old mirror on the way, he always momentarily found an added fondness for himself—a sudden sense of fitness in that bright and light-limbed apparition. As he came back from hunting—his tired horse walking at its own discretion

—"good-nights" were generally exchanged with every home-going labourer, before the welcoming lodge-gates were reached, which led so quickly on to tea, a comfortable chair, a warm bath possibly, and all the hospitalities waiting to give refreshment and repose to his contented body, a little wearied by its healthful exercise.

Most of his life had passed away somewhat like this, amid those rural people, and the gentle, adequate, monotonous sufficiency of their surroundings. He knew that every one up at the dear old place—"home" to him always—was fond of him, and that no canvassing could be needful in his own familiar neighbourhood.

For Claud possessed a rare persuasive nature that captivated all—even the unsusceptible—and lent a subtle atmosphere of sympathy to all who came within its influence. He was himself wholly unconscious of this charm. He only knew that every one was always very kind to him, and welcomed him so warmly, out of the goodness of their hearts. There were, however, other neighbourhoods to conquer, meetings to hold, speeches to make, and all the necessary duties that claim a candidate's at-

tention; and he felt that he ought to be moving homewards as soon as possible.

Claud was neither conceited nor priggish. He did not cherish the belief that his return to Parliament, if it took place, would make any material difference in the future course of our affairs. Had any one asked him what his programme was, he would probably have replied, "At first to wait and listen"; and if they had further pressed him for views as to the right conduct of the Government, he might have added that at the present moment what was most wanted was a Government whose executive could be relied on to prove firm, dexterous, and consistent; and that until this was secured, its legislative functions might with advantage cease to be so all-absorbing and so questionably adventitious.

But as his election address, when it is finished, will let us have some further insight into his views, we will return with him to some of the more practical affairs of the present moment.

First of all came the interview with Mrs Denbigh. He found her in, alone, and expecting him;

for he had sent a little note beforehand asking her for an interview. She rose when he entered, and received him with perfectly complacent kindness. If she felt any surprise, there was no sign of it apparent in her manner. She even smiled a little as she told him that when his note came, she had just been sitting down to write and ask him if he would care to come and say good-bye to them before they left for England.

“Then I’m additionally glad I called,” said Claud, brightly.

“It is a pity Claudia is out, because I am sure that she will be sorry to miss you.”

“Perhaps I may take your note for written, and call again in the afternoon.”

Mrs Denbigh could not refuse a murmured assent; and there came a pause for a moment, perceived by both, before Claud continued—

“You know that my uncle and I had a slight difference about a confidential communication which came to be published; I have been able to satisfy him as to its authorship.”

“Ah!” Mrs Denbigh whispered the word, with an air of unconcern which was slightly exasperat-

ing. She seemed to regard the affair as one which in no way concerned her.

“Miss Rattletubs has been kind enough to permit me to mention her name. It was she who wrote the article in the ‘Morning Gazette’; and as she admits it, her informant’s name need never be mentioned.”

Remembrance seized Mrs Denbigh, and recalled to her mind each word she had spoken that day to Miss Rattletubs. With one breath, as of gathering wind, it lifted the mists of forgetfulness—every detailed fact stood forth, etched on her memory.

“Have you already mentioned it?” she asked instinctively.

“To no one.”

“You are very generous,” she said, rising; “for I am sure that you might have practically cleared yourself with your uncle had you told him my name. You will believe me, that when you spoke to me last I had entirely forgotten that I had repeated the news to any one. The mention of Miss Rattletubs’ name has recalled it all to me.”

"My uncle has become a Conservative," went on Claud, beginning to break fresh ground, "and he has asked me to stand for our Division as a Conservative. I have accepted; I feel it a great honour. My brother Bob, you know, isn't exactly political," he added, almost apologetically. "All he cares for is shooting fierce animals in outlandish places. That is the reason, of course, why my uncle has been kind enough to offer it to me. I think that I may say I have been reinstated in his good graces."

Mrs Denbigh resolutely faced the consequences of their mutual explanation and forgiveness. She decided in a moment that she must be generous as well as just. She said instantly, "I shall be delighted to hear of your success."

Claud felt a liquid heat in his throat which he tried to gulp down, but which came pumping up from his heart in spite of his efforts.

"And now you will let me speak to your daughter," he said. "I am sure you will;" and he caught Mrs Denbigh's hand automatically.

She presented to him her finest smile as she said, "You must feel that you have conquered. I

withdraw all opposition. We must leave the decision to Claudia."

"You are very good—how can I thank you?" was all that he said, as he bent his head over her hand and gave it a grateful and timid kiss.

CHAPTER XX.

MRS LEO was dangerously ill. There were also several other cases of fever. People had not yet taken any general alarm, but there was a prevalent feeling that the Southern season was fairly over; and the crowded trains moving Northwards unmistakably registered this. Those English who were not starting within the next day or two were only remaining until the grand entertainment was over, before taking their departure.

Now that the later spring had added an ardent warmth to the endless sunshine, the little place seemed still choicer, still more ideal, and charmed increasingly every day with its gradual growth of resource and dainty experience. If there was illness, the life of the place went on, apparently unconcerned and uninfluenced by its presence.

Lawn-tennis continued from morning to night. The courts were made of marble mosaic, and the pattern being either coral or delicate grey colour, gave a soft tone to the eye, and did not glare oppressively in the sunshine.

Claudia played a great deal. She was very good at tennis, as at almost all games. Her alertness and supple quickness were wonderful. Quite a little crowd of admiring spectators would gather round when she and Darlington—also a first-rate player when he chose to exert himself—were having a match. At the tennis tournament, Claudia drew Redburn against Miss White and Darlington. The set proved a very close one; the finish was most exciting, and it ended with Redburn and Claudia winning by one point only.

In the gentlemen's singles, Darlington beat Redburn, but was beaten by Bertie; for the graceful and languid Bertie displayed a remarkable mastery over most things, when he cared to induce his lovely and much cherished self to contend in a game or exercise. His "indolent sweetness" of manner still seemed to possess him, but his strokes were as certain and swift as a champion's; and his

disgusted opponent generally grew demoralised after a game or two. He was afterwards beaten, however, and the prize was finally carried off by a "county champion." Tennis was not the greatest, although it was one of the most universal, of amusements. The greater part of the players kept it as a resource when there was nothing more special on hand. Yachts came, and encouraged much-sought-after luncheons in cosy cabins—not persistently rolling, but resting as still as though trained by the taming shore into perfect repose. Lord Mawnan had not returned; in his place a beautiful schooner yacht had come with the Duke of Oxford, and a capital moonlight dance on her deck had been the result. Five-o'clock teas, which members were able to give in their own rooms to their friends, had become quite the fashion. The Princess of Chioggia still continued her delightful little afternoon parties in her classical atrium.

Lady Marlowe was often "at home" to her friends, and every one asked was sure of a bright welcome, the best of strawberries, and a certain superior quality of conversation which made it a privilege to find one's self there.

Lady Marlowe expected all her guests to exert themselves somewhat for the general good of the whole ; and if only the guests can be persuaded themselves to acknowledge this duty, it is surprising what a brilliant result may be obtained. In nothing did Lady Marlowe show her cleverness more than in this ; for her guests were not only made to realise what was expected of them, they even attempted to duly fulfil their part of the understanding, and follow the perfect example of their brilliant hostess. “If you can’t be anything else, you must be amusing,” she used to say, quite as a matter of course, to the young men who clustered around the door. One day she met Tottie, and boldly told him that he had behaved so extremely foolishly at her last party, that she did not intend to invite him next time. Lady Downstreamdown appeared at one of them. She was affable, but she did not entirely approve of her hostess. She thought her wanting in dignity, and too much given to lending her countenance to equivocal “movements,” as well as to people whose antecedents were very obscure, and whose incomes proceeded from sources difficult to ascertain. She particularly

disapproved of Lady Marlowe's activity on behalf of the Primrose League. She regarded the League as both frivolous and mischievous. The Whigs require no such support; *her* husband had always held office under a Liberal Government without the aid of such childish tomfoolery.

Lady Downstreamdown accepted Miss van Knut at last as a wonderful specimen of the American girl. She acquiesced in the young lady's right to have a different standard, another code of behaviour, a fresh assortment of conventions. She even came to admire her for some of her points. Perfect ease and unconscious straightforwardness Lady Downstreamdown had always held to be definite signs of breeding, and Miss van Knut had both these virtues to an almost bewildering degree.

She felt more than relieved and most truly thankful that the young lady had had "a sufficient amount of self-respect"—so she termed it—to refuse Darlington's mad request.

But in the bottom of her heart there remained a slight residuum of pique. Her own Darlington exposed to a rebuff from the daughter of "an American sewage-man"! It must be put down, with

everything else, to those unknown, unknowable instincts and motives, and "general ways of going on," that appear to belong to countries which are not in Europe. She was not accustomed to let her curiosity about anything long remain unsatisfied, and she quickly made up her mind to ascertain why Miss van Knut was not ruled by our laws of nature.

"My dear," she said to her one day, "you will excuse an old woman's asking you rather a delicate question. But I want to know why you didn't accept him?"

"Because I don't love him," said Miss van Knut shortly, as though that were conclusive; and then suddenly carried the war into the enemy's country by asking in turn, "Why, what other reason could there be, Lady Downstreamdown?"

"I should hardly have thought that was a sufficient one—under the circumstances," said the Countess.

Miss van Knut felt inclined to retort that the Countess was right; there was another: every one (including Darlington's mother) would have accused her of laying herself out to entrap his lordship.

She hesitated, and then she suddenly said, "Lord Darlington is such a boy—such a mere boy."

"You are quite right," said the Countess, with her good-humour quite reinstated. "He is only a silly boy. You show your wisdom in taking no notice of his foolish passing fancies. He imagines himself in love—every few months—but it passes off." This last statement was not strictly true, but was added to emphasise the intended moral.

"Under his mother's treatment?" was the conclusion which was offered by Miss van Knut; and the Countess had to accept it as best she might.

The satisfaction of curiosity was not the only duty that Lady Downstreamdown had to perform. It required the utmost tact and maternal watchfulness to keep Darlington properly occupied. He refused to leave Pompeii, either for Venice or home, until after the coming entertainment. The only thing, therefore, left for his mother to do, was to keep him amused. She tried to throw him with any young lady who came within range. She cultivated Mrs Denbigh; and it may be imagined with what assiduity her efforts were backed up by that lady. Claudia and Darlington were already old

friends. They had often hunted and fished together, and had seen a great deal of each other in the easy ways which exist (or may be discovered) in large country-houses. Darlington's doings generally took the direction in which he unconsciously found least resistance. And now that the silent unrealised powers had decreed and arranged a companionship for him with his old playfellow, he naturally found himself constantly with her. The two had all sorts of interests and amusements together. He was taken to see the invalid up in the vine-covered cottage — "the little brigand," Claudia always called her. They used to pretend that she was the captain of the troop. "I have brought you a prisoner—such a grand prisoner!" she said to the child; and then turning to Darlington, told him that he could not escape without paying a ransom. "It's usual for people's relatives to ransom them," Darlington said, and further suggested that as Claudia seemed to be one of the troop, indeed their decoy, she should go back to his mother and get the money from her.

"Very well; I'm quite ready to go," she answered demurely, and laughed to herself at the

notion of Darlington left quite alone with an invalid child, and unable to speak a word of Italian. She kissed the child and walked out of the cottage.

"Here, I say, don't go without me!" called out Darlington inconsistently. He rushed out of the cottage, but the "little brigand" found five silver francs in her hand as the result of the visit. All her powers of simple adoration had before this been lavished on Claudia; but now they were shared by the beautiful gentleman, who looked like one of the blessed saints, and had showered such unspeakable wealth upon her.

Perhaps Lady Downstreamdown and Mrs Denbigh would not have felt equally satisfied with their little arrangement, had they been able to overhear some of their young people's conversation. Instead of falling in love with each other, Darlington and Claudia spent much of their time in discussing how Miss van Knut should be induced to relent.

"She simply laughed at me," Darlington complained.

Claudia knew how often laughter is a wavering

danger-flag; is simply assumed for defence—not so much to expose the light heart as to conceal the heavy one.

“She may say what she likes, but I am sure she cares for you,” Claudia said, her quick woman’s instinct vibrating like a divining rod over the golden ore of love.

“Then why doesn’t she have me?” cried Darlington, almost pettishly.

“Pride, I think. A woman, you know, who respects herself, has a great deal of pride. She knew that if she accepted you, every one would believe she had simply been scheming to catch you. She knew that your people would be furious, and would never forgive her. Americans have a great deal of independence.”

“If that’s all, I’ll soon settle her,” replied Darlington, resolutely; “and now we had better get back as quick as we can, as there’s what my young brother would call ‘an awful swagger storm’ coming on.”

The same evening Darlington and Miss van Knut were to run through their little piece together. It was not to be a regular rehearsal, and the

stage-manager had fixed to have it in his private sitting-room when the time came. They got on pretty well, as they both knew their words; and if fluency did encroach upon passion, they were after all only trying it over. Although the stage-manager was out of the room—being absent a minute on business—they continued the piece. Miss van Knut looks through the keyhole and exclaims—

“‘Ah, now they have commenced the last prayer; in one brief minute we shall be at liberty to enter.’”

Then Darlington replies, “‘At liberty to enter! I would rather be bound to remain.’”

Lucy retorts, “‘Like a dog that’s shut out from his dinner.’”

And Charlie replies, “‘I would rather be a dog and be shut out with you, than be an angel in there devouring my morning beef-steak and coffee.’”

Lucy, “‘You don’t consider my feelings, it seems.’” And she begins to sob and murmur, “‘But it serves me right for missing prayers.’”

At this point Darlington has to fall on his knees, and he certainly did so with great energy. “‘You shall not miss them while I am by; you shall listen to mine—for I love you.’”

To which Miss van Knut, as Lucy, has to reply —“‘You may feel like a dog when you’re talking to me, but you need not take me for a bone.’”

Now comes the famous speech—

“‘O child, child! it is bitter, bitter! Do not trifle with a strong man’s heart!’” Darlington gave this in his exquisitely ludicrous way, and Miss van Knut burst out laughing as usual.

“You mustn’t say it like that, Lord Darlington; you mustn’t throw so much energy into it.”

“I can’t help it.”

“Then I can’t help laughing.”

“I can’t put less feeling into it, because I am not simply acting. I really mean it; you know I do.”

“Gracious! the idea of your really calling me ‘child, child’!” she said, laughing afresh. “And your talking in earnest about your ‘strong man’s heart’!”

“I can’t help the bosh in the play,” he said, hotly. “I love you; you know I do. If you won’t hear me, I’ll make you laugh on the night—I swear I will. But if we can only get properly engaged by then, you see we shall be able to act it so much better.”

“Oh you funny boy!” was all that she answered.

“I swear I will be funny, and make you laugh.”

“I guess I shan’t laugh, whatever I do,” she said, as the stage-manager’s return compelled them to finish the piece in real earnest.

Games, and rehearsals, and five-o’clock teas with the ladies, did not exhaust the men’s list of amusements. Some of the gayer and more ardent spirits were said to indulge in the evening in festivities which assumed the nature of practical jokes. It was reported, for instance, that some excited and unrighteous young men undressed Mr Smythe and tumbled him into the swimming-bath, and that when he had got himself out at the other end his clothes were nowhere to be found, so that he had been compelled to walk home wrapped up in a bath-sheet. Even if the story were true, he apparently thought it best to say nothing about it. For Mr Smythe was a gentleman whose social pedestal was chiefly composed of conveniences to other people—and he knew it. If, therefore, there was anything to be gained by becoming an object for the practical jokes of the *right* young men, it was best to submit with as good a grace as possible.

Mr Leo felt that such affairs should be put down with a high hand. If they were not stopped at once, *any one* might find himself the next victim, and Mr Leo did not at all relish the chance of a similar escapade. A scathing article came out in 'The Highest Aim' the following week on "The young man as a savage," and perhaps would have ensured the catastrophe which it denounced, had it been seen by any of the tormentors.

Darlington was not the only person whom Claudia had taken to see her "little brigand." Mr van Knut had been one of "the prisoners" captured, and Claudia had promised to take Prince Chioggia's children with her the next time she went to see the child.

So one fine morning they all started forth. Claudia ran races with them, and told them that she would teach them lawn-tennis if they would like to learn. The small children were delighted, but the eldest boy said, with a quaint childish air of dignity, "I cannot play tennis—I am a Roman."

And Claudia could not help smiling at the little Roman prince's unconscious and unintentional scorn of the barbarous pastimes of our savage North.

They soon arrived at the cottage. The children gazed at the small invalid with a mixture of awe and sympathy. They gave her some chocolate which they had brought for her, and then they were seized with a childish shyness that gave them nothing to say. The child also looked at them without speaking; but in her it was silent adoration that held back her speech from utterance. A child sometimes feels this sudden passionate admiration for another—a feeling akin to worship rather than love, as though the other were a visitant from another world. And on account of the very strength of this feeling, the child is filled with a speechless reserve, a reticent shyness, almost amounting to shame, which makes it fiercely strive to conceal its feelings from everyone, and prevents it from being able to talk to the very child who has so suddenly captivated its little heart.

The invalid looked on the other children as she might have looked had four child-angels come in through the door with presents in their hands and a halo of golden sunshine all round them.

“And now,” said Claudia to the children, “I am going to read to Guilia, so perhaps you had better run away.”

They said good-bye; the boys kissed Claudia’s hand, in their pretty caressing Italian way; their governess, who had remained all the while as a kind of material background, followed them out, and they were gone.

Claudia sat down in the warm stillness of the cottage by the child’s bedside, and began to read to her. She read on and on, not heeding the passing minutes. The child lay quite still on her little bed with her eyelids closed. Claudia at last thought that she must have dropped off asleep. She closed the book, and sat watching the insects that flashed from flower to flower in the sunny garden. A monotonous hum of happy occupation filled the air. The breeze was heavy with all the scents of early summer. The spirit of slumber passed in from the hot external sunshine, and dwelt amidst the drowsy shadows of the cottage.

Claudia idly wondered if she too were fated to succumb. She felt the spell gathering, and thought that sleep’s gentle dominion would soon prevail,

when a shadow touched the doorway. She turned her head. It was Claud.

"I have heard all about your little patient, and have come to see her," he said as he entered. He was warm with his climb, and a chair was inviting him. He sat down; but his eyes did not rest on the child's pale face—pale even against the white pillow. They gave Claudia an unspeakably tender glance, and then looked on the ground with a sudden retreat into shyness.

"We must be very quiet—she is asleep," said Claudia, gently.

Claud put a little packet of cherries which he had brought for the child on the pillow close to the little nestling face. The crimson bloom of the fruit gave a look as of death to the wasted cheeks.

"She will think that another good fairy has been here when she wakes. I am afraid you will all spoil her." Claudia stooped slowly forward and picked up a cherry. "I must have just one for myself," she said. "They are too tempting."

"We will each have one for luck," said Claud, picking out two of the reddest and ripest for the talisman.

“The child is asleep; we shall only wake her by staying. I think that I, at least, shall be going back.”

“It is so peaceful here; let us sit on a little longer. We need not talk above a whisper.”

Claudia did not assent, but she did not move. She felt a drowsy quiescence steal over her. The warmth of the day had made her sleepy, and it was pleasant to acquiesce in a whispered request that they should linger a little longer in the cool and shady cottage. Yet in spite of this passive contentment, she felt far away, in the unfamiliar depths of her nature, a strange movement stirring; a thrill as subtle as some magnetic fluid, which touched every nerve into kindling alertness, and became the prophetic herald of an approaching crisis.

Claud also felt himself borne along by the spell of opportunity, and still they sat in silence a little longer before he said gently, “Do you remember that night—that lovely night of the ball—when we floated out seawards, and lingered and lingered?”

“Could I have forgotten it?” Claudia answered, in almost a whisper. Her eyelids fell and her

cheeks grew hot, she scarcely knew why. She continued hastily, "It seems such a long time, doesn't it?"

And Claud murmured, "Yes. Many things have happened since then. And now that we both are going—going away, I want to tell you once more how I love you." They both rose instinctively. "I may tell you now, for all my troubles have cleared away. Claudia, darling, will you be mine, for ever and ever?"

She did not wonder, or reason, or pause. She could not. A wave of maidenly passion so sweetly strange, so strangely sweet, broke over her, with its unknown, unrealised, unexpected enchantment; and she found herself clasped in the arms and pressed to the beating heart of him whom she evermore must love and cherish through all eternity.

There was a moment's pause. Only the slumberous hum of the busy untiring bees made faint music out in the happy garden, and the fitful stir of the poor little invalid told them that they were not yet alone.

"My darling, I am so happy," was all that Claud said, still holding her in his arms. And then, as he

stooped to kiss her, the child suddenly opened her eyes.

She was not surprised. She smiled as she said, "Have you brought another beautiful gentleman here to see me?"

And Claudia, turning round with a smile caught from happiness, such as comes only once to each of us on this side of the grave, said, "Yes; the most beautiful gentleman of them all, for he is going to be my husband."

CHAPTER XXI.

As no Liberal Prime Minister—or indeed any Prime Minister—would ever in reality propose anything so unpatriotic, unstatesmanlike, and unscrupulous as a Home Rule Bill for Ireland, we will not dwell on the details of this impossible little fiction, which has only been invented (as before stated) because no other conduct on the part of a Liberal Premier would have been base enough to drive Lord St Kevan over to the opposite camp.

But though the author cannot undertake to describe the consequences of this measure, we need not be prevented from speculating a little on what might conceivably happen if anything so impossible were ever really to be proposed. One can fancy, for instance, the dismay of the Liberal

party—the dismay of the many at having so soon to eat their words, and explain away their frantic denunciations of the Irish party, and their indignation at the infamy of an (imagined) compact between that party and the Conservatives. For it may be concluded—by pessimists—that no idea of resistance to their leader would occur to the many, even though such resistance were demanded alike by consistency, honour, and honesty. One can fancy the still greater dismay of the few whose consciences and reasoning powers were in fair working order, and who, being neither cowardly nor shameless, would feel compelled to oppose the leader by whom they had been betrayed. Imagine the vindictive fury of Mr Giles and his caucuses at any one daring to be honourable and honest, reasonable and consistent, in opposition to their commands and the commands of the leader, who was none of these things!

Mr Giles had not so much welcomed the Bill on account of any supposed good it might do for Ireland, as because he had believed that it would pass “the Commons” and be thrown out by “the Lords.”

“See,” he had cried with unctuous glee, “what a capital chance it will give us for attacking ’em! After they’ve thrown it out we can put all the subsequent disorders down to them—and there’ll be plenty of disorder, I promise you. I daresay there’ll be anarchy from end to end of Ireland; and all, you know, because the Lords dared to oppose the will of the people. Why,” he used to add, to some kindred spirit at the National Liberal Club, “it will give us such a chance of destroying ’em as we mayn’t get again.”

With those patriotic and statesmanlike views, we can but faintly picture to ourselves the incredulous fury of Giles when he began to realise that perhaps, after all, the Bill might not pass the Commons. It is true that Liberal Governments have been defeated before now, but never *such* a Government. It differed from all other Governments in the almost divine attributes assumed by its leader; and to vote against him (whatever he, in his wisdom, might suggest) ceased to be a blunder, and became an impious and unpardonable crime.

And yet there were many Liberals who, at last being driven to bay, were determined to commit

this crime, and resist the Bill to the death. Unlike Lord St Kevan, they did not consider that resistance to such a measure and such a Minister was inconsistent with their allegiance to their party, especially when such resistance involved the maintenance of that party's traditional principles.

Indeed, should we be in a sanguine mood, it is not difficult to conceive that all the more independent, patriotic, and statesmanlike Liberals would combine to oppose a Bill which, if passed, would infallibly pave the way for the ruin both of the country that was to capitulate and the country that was to be made victorious.

Let us do Mr Cade the justice to suppose that even he drew back, and, throwing his leader over, appeared as one of the champions of the Union. We may readily believe that he found the vague hopes he had sometimes held out looked very different when introduced by the Prime Minister in the distorted and concrete form of this Bill.

We should also remember that Mr Cade was still a comparatively young man. In ten years' time, when the irreparable evil of the Bill (if it

passed) had made itself manifest, he would probably have become, had he supported it, a useful victim on whom the wrath of the enraged and disillusioned democracy might be poured.

If, then, we conclude that Mr Cade resisted the measure, we may be sure that the caucuses—*his* caucuses—were not slow to resent his honesty and independence.

They naturally proclaimed him a turncoat and a traitor (“Judas,” I think, was the favourite word), because he had been both unchanging and consistent in his conduct,—because, in reality, he had refused to become a turncoat and a traitor to please the whim of a leader who had succeeded in becoming both. Mr Giles brought a “little pressure” to bear upon him, and determined that, as a punishment, he should be the recipient of a squeeze from his own machinery. But the reader by this time will have learnt that Mr Cade was not a man to be crushed; and so (if all this were really to have happened) we may be quite sure that he was more than a match for his enemies.

In addition we may be sure—or rather the more malignant and Conservative of us (we are told that

the two qualities generally go together) will be prepared to believe—that no trick, however dubious or dirty, was left untried in order to entrap or coerce the independent minority; that every form of force and fraud which Mr Giles and the caucus could suggest was employed; that the Prime Minister's malign dexterity of dubious phrase was flourished with even more than customary cunning; that he explained his explanations, and then again explained their explanation, with increasing mystery and decreasing information; that parts of the Bill, declared inalienable and vital, were dropped and then replaced; completely contradictory promises were made and broken; and finally, that the party seem to have been promised, or understood that they were promised to a certain undefined extent, that if only they would pass the Bill, so as to keep the Government in office, as a reward the very Bill itself should be abandoned, and they would only find themselves pledged to nothing worse than an abstract resolution.

And we may still be reluctantly forced to believe that such conduct was possible under the circumstances, even if the Liberal press were to treat

the prophecy as one born of Tory lies and calumnies ; because it will be generally found that if any foreseeing but indiscreet Conservative ever suggests that under certain given circumstances the Premier will take a (let us say) *characteristic* course of action, the Liberal press cry out against the libel, indignantly deny it, and finally boast that they have killed that Tory calumny. Then, the given circumstances arising, it turns out after all that the peculiarly *characteristic* course *is* taken ; and the principles of honesty and honour are once more readjusted to suit the Premier's momentary convenience.

It is time to end our little fiction, however ; and it can have but one conclusion. Of course the only supposition possible for any of us who are Englishmen is, that the Bill was thrown out. That event, at any rate, will not be challenged by even the fiercest of Radicals ; we all must acknowledge that no British Parliament *could* do otherwise. We know that such a Bill would be thrown out—thrown out in spite of every dodge that a Premier and his mechanisms could perpetrate ; in spite of irritable and inconsequent letters he might hurl against all his old friends and colleagues who dared to commit

the unpardonable crime of disagreement; in spite of wild appeals to ignorance and prejudice to show at last their real strength and overpower all education, enlightenment, and common-sense; in spite of a manifesto from a "working man M.P." (even he had been corrupted by "the classes," for he had at last conventionalised his spelling until it was undistinguishable from theirs, instead of being stamped with the freedom and independence of that of a son of the soil), couched in words so long and language so grandiloquent, that it was almost incomprehensible to the educated classes—presumably, therefore, not so much intended to convey a meaning to the men to whom it was addressed, as to fill them with a vague awe, and cow them by the sacred sanction of unintelligible mystery; in spite of a real Home Rule meeting at Exeter Hall, presided over by a cynical humourist, and addressed by a "captain" in the Salvation Army, two working men M.P.'s, an honest and industrious plumber, a footman (out of place), and other authorities on the subject. It would be thrown out not only in spite of this "glorious meeting," but in spite of the meeting's resolution to the effect that "This meeting accords its heartiest

sympathy and warmest support to the Prime Minister, as it believes that any measure he may introduce for the future government of Ireland, or any modifications he may see fit to make in such a measure, will guarantee the future peace and prosperity of that country, and prove a final solution of the Irish question." Finally, even in spite of similar resolutions being passed by the Cowes Liberal Three Hundred, the Highgate Home Rule Association, the Wellington Radical Brotherhood, the Imperial Disintegration Society, the Crown and Peers' Liberation Society, the Banbury Junior Liberal Club, the Colonial Emancipation Society, the Young Women's Advancement Association, and many others.

The Bill was thrown out, but Mr Giles did not feel himself beaten. He made up his mind to a dissolution, and determined to assist the Prime Minister in appealing to the worst passions of the mob under the taking names of Justice, Love, and Conciliation. "If after that," he said, "England should happen to disapprove of us and of our policy — why, so much the worse for England. We shall have to teach her a lesson, and a pretty

sharp one too. At any rate, we'll make any other Government but ours impossible." And perhaps it will not be a surprise to any one who has read thus far, when he hears that the intentions of our (happily fictitious) Premier were not very different from those of Mr Giles.

The dissolution took place. Now was the moment for Claud to stand for his Division of the county. Instead of dawdling at Pompeii, he ought to have been hard at work among the voters, educating the agricultural mind to a sense of its manifest duty, and the awful responsibility that rested on its decision. It is true that this education was most satisfactorily accomplished in his absence—perhaps even more effectually than if he had been present—by a series of comfortable and convincing placards, which displayed in enticing colours the royal standard of England as it is at present, and the royal standard of the future with the Irish corner and its harp completely blotted out. The agricultural mind, even if it could not read, was possessed of a sufficient sense of symmetry and proportion to at once feel that there must be something wrong in this, and for the first time had

doubts concerning the wisdom of the obliterating policy. When the district was further placarded with realistic pictures of the Prime Minister pulling down the Union-jack, it gradually became convinced that it could not support any measure of Home Rule for Ireland. But where was Claud, that placards had to take his place, instead of supplementing his endeavours?

He was still at Pompeii: he was not well, and every day he seemed to be becoming worse. After the happiest moment of his life, when he had held his darling in his arms amid the blaze of undreamt-of joy that sudden possession lit for him, the two had wandered back together—probably hand in hand, they did not know or care—and had gone straight to Mrs Denbigh for her blessing. In the evening, Claud had not felt at all well, and next morning, after an almost sleepless night, he had become quite ill. The doctor was not sure whether he was sickening for typhoid; and the long day wore on, only brightened by visits from Claudia and Darlington.

The announcement of the dissolution had come that very morning, together with a letter from

Lord St Kevan, asking Claud to return in order to attend to his election, and requesting that his address might be sent by return of post if possible.

Poor Claud sat up in bed. He was ill, and was becoming worse every moment. Already he felt as though his head were bursting; he felt his body strangely light, yet sinking, like a feather fluttering down a bottomless abyss.

“Claudia,” he said, turning his head so that his eyes might rest on her in one continuous and satisfying look, “I must dictate this address somehow or other—if you will be so good as to write it down.”

She got pen and paper. He dictated quickly—at times with that almost breathless fervour which fever gives. At last he lay back exhausted, closing his eyes, but the address was finished. It was as follows:—

“GENTLEMEN,—I take this opportunity of thanking you for the honour you have done me, in asking me to offer myself as a candidate for the representation of your Division of the county.

“Believing, as I do, that the great factors of all

political, moral, and social progress may be summed up in the two words *duty* and *moral courage*,—duty to do what we believe to be right, and what we also believe will be for the true welfare of our country, in spite even of unpopularity, and irrespective of the consequences to ourselves; moral courage to face the probable results of our acts, and to resist, if necessary, the constantly fluctuating tides of average opinion,—I shall feel it my duty to oppose with all my might the present Government, who, instead of being faithful to the great traditional principles of their party, have put off till to-morrow what should have been done to-day; have tried to shirk instead of recognising their responsibilities, until they have plunged us into the unspeakable shame of a betrayal of those who trusted us, and the deliberate sacrifice of England's noblest son; and finally, have sought to weaken and destroy, with the hope of snatching a party victory, not only all our constitutional safeguards, but even our constitution itself.

“A party can only end in failure and disgrace which, while in Opposition, tries to thwart and

neutralise the foreign policy of her Majesty's Government, substituting for it, when in power, a policy in which weakness takes the place of consistency, and vacillation that of logical clearness; which bribes the agricultural labourer with promises which it knows can never be fulfilled; which sets class against class, threatens the security of capital, and finally joins in a conspiracy with the avowed enemies of England—'men marching through rapine to the dismemberment of the empire'—with the hope of destroying the supremacy of the Imperial Parliament and the integrity of the United Kingdom.

"I need not here denounce Home Rule. You will find it denounced in far stronger language than I can employ if you will refer to the various speeches and addresses of the Liberal candidates during the last election. That many of these gentlemen are at the present moment advocating such a measure at the dictation of a Premier who has purchased the Irish vote and office at the price of his country's betrayal, is but another proof that these gentlemen are not only prepared to sacrifice their strongest principles, but are also prepared to sacrifice the

loyalists of Ireland, the true welfare of that country, the supremacy of the United Kingdom, and every tie of honesty and honour, if only by so doing they can obtain a brief and shameless spell of power. 'A great country deserts its subjects either because it has been crushed beyond hope in the field of battle, or because it has ceased to be a great country and is travelling fast down the road of national decay.'

"On you and on your fellow-electors depends the momentous decision whether our country shall fall beneath the heel of 'the most powerful, unscrupulous, and destructive demagogue who ever appeared in British public life'; or whether it shall emancipate itself from its thralldom, and once more rise up—feared by the wicked and trusted by the good—doing justice to all alike with the same brave determination, yielding neither to foreign foes nor to domestic traitors, and earning once again the admiration and respect of all right-thinking men. I believe that the good cause will triumph. But if it is not to be lost in irredeemable disgrace, each one of us must put aside our party ties, our personal considerations, and join with those who are

now loyally fighting for their country's honour, its united Government, and even, it may be, for its very future existence.

“ ‘Sharers of our glorious past,
Brothers, must we part at last?
Shall not we through good and ill
Cleave to one another still?
Britain's myriad voices call
“Sons, be welded, each and all,
Into one Imperial whole,
One with Britain heart and soul!
One life, one flag, one fleet, one throne!”
Britons, hold your own!
And God guard all!’

—I have the honour to remain, &c.,

“CLAUD BROWNLOW.”

“Isn't it just a little long?” said Claudia, when he had finished his dictation, and was lying back exhausted with the effort.

“Isn't it rather too much of a sermon?” asked Claud in reply.

“Oh, I think the principles are beautiful.”

“My dear child,” said Claud, with the ghost of his ready smile crossing his face, “it's so easy to express beautiful principles—the great difficulty is

to carry them out in practice. However," he continued, with a little weary tone, "you had better let it go as it is; my uncle will cut it down and revise it if it isn't expressed in the orthodox way. Among the Whig families, you know, there is a particular style for their election addresses—just as there is a particular style for the Queen's speech—and I am afraid I have not inherited it."

"I wonder what Lord Darlington will say in his address."

"Darlington! Yes; what fun it would be if one could only see his efforts to make it up! My dear chap," he said, turning his head towards Darlington, who had entered at this moment, "what are you going to say in your address?"

"I really don't know," replied Darlington serenely, taking a chair as he spoke, and looking at Claud with his blue eyes filled with a real concern when he saw how ill he was looking.

"Let us make one up for you then," put in Claudia, mischievously.

"I am anxious to restore to the Irish their just rights, and to ensure their future peace and prosperity, by releasing them from the shameful tyranny

of a foreign Government, thus enabling them for the future to manage their own affairs by a judiciously controlled Legislative Assembly in Dublin," said Claud in a demure voice, as though he were reading the address.

"I am also anxious that every agricultural labourer, instead of precariously subsisting on daily wages, should be able to gain a competency by the cultivation of his own allotment; and it therefore will give me the greatest pleasure to offer portions of my father's property at a nominal price to any labourers anxious to possess them, in order that my aspirations for their benefit may have a practical fulfilment," added Claudia, laughing.

Darlington got up and went to the window, for he did not like to be chaffed on such a solemn subject as his election address.

"My father is writing my address," he said, with his small consequential air of importance.

"But what are you going to say in your speeches?" persisted Claud.

"I don't know." Then he turned round with the air of one who is going to make a point. "You may be sure, whatever I say," he broke in with a

tone of triumph, "I shall pitch into the Tories well. I'm going to give it 'em hot."

"My dear boy, spare us!" cried Claud from his bed.

"What about Home Rule?" asked Claudia.

"We are not supporting Home Rule; we are going in for a large and comprehensive scheme of local self-government," replied Darlington with dignity.

"And what, pray, is that?" asked Claud.

"Well, my dear chap, I daresay it's much the same thing," said Darlington, coming back to his chair in his restless way, and stroking Claud's hand with a little appealing gesture, which seemed to imply that Claud was aware he knew nothing about it, and that therefore it was very unkind to put him through this catechism.

"Well, try not to ruin the country," said Claud.

Then Darlington uttered one of his few recorded epigrams. "There can be no fear of our ruining the country," he said, "while Redburn is upholding the Constitution by blacking his face and singing nigger songs at Primrose League teas. Of course we can't leave our party; and so we must abuse

the Conservatives," he added. "The governor says that the Premier can't last long; and then the Whigs will regain their proper influence and position. Besides, the governor's sure of the Buckhounds in the next Government; and think what a lark that'll be! I know my mother is longing to overhaul the enclosure list for Ascot."

"Put my name down, and I forgive you," laughed Claud, as Darlington went off to see about his play. "He's a dear chap," said Claud, as he caught an echo in Claudia's eyes. "But fancy him in Parliament! And yet I daresay he'll make a very good member. Men like Darlington generally go with their party—chiefly, I think, from thoughtlessness. But if they really believe that anything is dishonourable or dishonest, they are perfectly firm; nothing will make them yield. And after all, if one considers the members of Parliament individually, one sometimes really can hardly understand how we are governed at all."

Claud ceased speaking, and lay with his eyes closed: he was very tired with all his exertions, and the fever was becoming higher as the afternoon wore on. Claudia read to him through the slow

hours that passed, and were recorded only by one long thin patch of sunshine, which glided in between the blind and window, and crept across the farther wall with almost imperceptible deliberation.

When we are seized by illness, or by a sudden trouble, we long to have our thoughts taken away from self. We are seized by a wistful desire that our wandering fancies may be captured by some strong knight-errant of romance. The affairs of every day and their accompanying literature, which we find almost unavoidable in health and activity, now seem suddenly to have become so trivial, so ephemeral, so terribly unsatisfying in their smart barren artificiality; and we turn with a sudden longing—almost home-sickness—to some once loved, now almost forgotten book, which we used to know so well and ponder over so lovingly in the old days long ago. Claud had bethought him of those three brave novels which come to us, whether in health or sickness, with renewed and never-wearied satisfaction, with a breezy air of buoyant healthfulness, and almost with the epic force and freshness of the ‘*Odyssey*.’ They are so full of manliness and truth, of chivalrous honesty,

generous honour, and wholesome ever-varying adventure, that they brace the mind like sea-winds blowing over moorlands, and in so doing seem even to help the suffering body to regain its tone. Claud had asked for 'Westward Ho !' or 'Lorna Doone,' or 'Esmond'; and Claudia had found the latter in the library. She was now reading it aloud. Chapter after chapter began and finished; the quiet story pursued its gentle course, as soothing as the sound of a slow river that murmurs on for ever over its glistening bed.

They read through Harry's earliest childhood with the old Huguenot; the long, long ride; the first brief interview between my lady and her little page; the mystery of Father Holt's nocturnal doings, which broke into the quiet days at Castlewood; the capture of my lady, the honest kindness of Dick Steel, and then the coming of "the new protectors."

Claudia's voice was singularly low and sweet. Sometimes she paused, and she and Claud would exchange a few remarks suggested by the story. Claud admitted that Esmond was a splendid fellow, but he pleaded that he always kept the warmest corner of his heart for young Castlewood.

Claudia, woman-like, spent all her store of admiration on the hero. She thought young Castlewood was selfish, thoughtless, vain, and very empty-headed.

“He was, he was,” said Claud; “but still he was charming for all that.”

They had even greater differences over Beatrix. Claud thought her perhaps the most brilliant and fascinating heroine of all romance; and when he was reminded of her faults, felt inclined to exclaim that she with her faults was finer than other women with all their virtues. This, of course, Claudia could not allow. If Beatrix was more gifted and more beautiful than other women, she said, the wrong was the greater if she was unworthy of those gifts, and if she allowed herself to be untrue to her highest self. She was even more selfish and heartless than her brother. She was beautiful but bad,—a terrible warning against unrestrained ambition.

The discussion was only interrupted by the doctor's evening visit. He found Claud worse, and ordered him absolute quiet. A nurse had been sent for; she would arrive soon to stay with him

through the night. The illness was declared to be typhoid, and he gave Claud his first large dose of quinine. It was so large that it would probably act as a narcotic, and might even perhaps render him partially insensible.

"You may stay till the nurse comes, and then you must leave for the night; but you may see our patient again in the morning," the doctor said kindly, before he went away.

The sun was setting. It filled the room (for the blind had been lifted) with rosy light, which to Claud, with his flying pulse and his restless fancies, seemed fired by a hot unearthly glare, in ghastly accord with the fever that grappled him. They had ceased talking now; they only held hands, and Claudia bathed his forehead at times with eau-de-Cologne. So the sun sank down, and the shadow of evening passed over these two young lovers, sitting on silently, waiting, they cared not for what; who felt that each was all in all to the other, and that, come what might, while a smile of love could be given or a dumb caress received, there were depths of happiness still in the world, unfathomed and unsuspected by any beside themselves.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE doctor, when he came next day, found that Claud was very ill. The fever had completely mastered him. He was not delirious, but he was still in a drowsy, half-conscious state from the effects of the quinine. The room was darkened and very still. Claud's rapid breathing and the ticking of his small railway clock were the only sounds which caught the ear. Claudia sat quite still and silent by the bed, and the doctor gave her leave to remain there, if she would help to keep the patient quiet. She read to him through all the morning, but in his torpid state he could not follow the thread of the story, or even gather what was passing; only the dear voice soothed him, and the gallant, graceless, loyal, swaggering life of the olden times seemed to entwine itself with his dreams.

During the night he had dreamt much and vividly. He thought he was once more back at Harrow, in those distant days which seem to us so long ago, when we still were small boys in "Eton collars." He was sitting in a class-room doing arithmetic; the drowsy afternoon crept by so slowly, it might have been endless. The sums went on and on, and would not finish. A maze, a haze of figures covered his paper; in vain he sought for his mistakes—he could not find them.

Then he was lying in his flannels on the warm short grass. There was a cricket-match; his side were in, and they were making a capital score. His head was resting on the captain's outstretched back; from such a comfortable pillow he could watch the players making their runs, and wait his turn for "going in" with lazy acquiescence.

The hot, cloudless afternoon, which shone with an almost blinding brightness, through the cool tent's mouth, and which seemed so quiet, in spite of the bracing sound of the batting, and the recurrent calls of "Over," gave him an indescribable sense of languid delight. How strangely happy he was as he sat once again in the midst of his light-hearted

schoolboy comrades, and once more watched for the moment when the field would be waiting for him "to go in" (as he used to go in, in those happy far-off days) to play his very best for the honour of his side and the victory of his dear old school! Next he dreamt he was lying at length in a boat, in some quiet backwater near Oxford. The sky was grey and overcast. Dark clouds massed themselves behind the shivering poplars, and the willow pollards bent their branches in obedience to the gusts of gathering wind that came at intervals with such chilly inhospitality, and whispered so mournfully among the trembling rushes. A hawthorn-hedge ran down towards the water; it terminated in a hurdle, through whose bars the distant city looked grey and almost ghostlike. The boat was fastened to a wild rose-tree, and was sheltered by the overhanging bank, crowned with a tangle of wet weeds and long grasses, and a little worn along its edges by the feet of the evening bathers.

He lay down in the bottom of his boat, and wondered vaguely why he could not rise and scull himself back to Oxford, where warmth, and friends, and tea were waiting for him in his snug oak-panelled

rooms that always grew even more home-like than usual, when lit by the cosy light of the flickering fire. Again his fancies changed with the mood of the fever that throbbed through his dreams softly, but with a gentle persistence,—as the sound of a distant thrashing-machine comes over the autumn fields with a dull continuous hum, and makes itself felt through all the lighter sounds that surround us. He dreamt he was floating along a river: in the boat were several others—men he had known and cared for at Oxford; and a soothing sense of their old affection—their friendly protection—came over him. The man in the stern had a banjo, and faintly hummed a song as the boat floated on. The dying sunset still flushed the sky behind them, and they left a rosy wake away to the fading daylight; but a thin blue mist was rising, and it stretched itself out in long obliterating lines of ghostly white. It seemed to him as though life itself were sinking away, following in the footsteps of the forsaking sun, and that he was swiftly drifting into another world of darkness and strange forgetfulness and gathering death. He murmured to himself some half-forgotten lines he had picked

up somewhere, and now recollected almost by chance :—

“ Dropping down the river,
’Midst the summer even,
Whilst the winds are heavy
With the blossom odours,
Whilst the birds are singing
In their sleepless nests.
Musical the rippling
Of the tardy current ;
Musical the murmur
Of the wind-swept trees ;
Musical the cadence
Of the friendly voices,
Laden with the sweetness
Of the songs of old.”

“ What is it, dear ? ” asked Claudia, bending over him to try and catch his murmured words.

“ I have been dreaming,” answered Claud, waking up slowly from his long night’s trance—“ dreaming of the old times at Harrow and Oxford.” He was quite awake now. The doctor came, and found the fever still so high that he ordered him to take ice-baths. Before he had the first one, however, Mrs Denbigh came in to see him. She was only allowed to stay a few moments, it being most important that he should be kept perfectly quiet.

She held his hand, and as she stroked his hair off his forehead she expressed to him all the concern and anxiety she was feeling on his account; and then she added, with a sudden maternal sweetness which greatly touched him, that for the future he must look upon her as his mother. He could only thank her by a look and a squeeze of the hand. Words are so often inadequate to express all our gratitude for an unexpected kindness, a revelation of unsuspected love. "You are too good," he murmured, and kissed her hand. Mrs Denbigh rose up to go, but just as she reached the door Darlington burst in without invitation, or even permission to enter, with his flushed and smiling face looking still more radiantly boyish than usual.

"Really, Lord Darlington, is this the way you enter a sick-room?" said Mrs Denbigh, severely.

Darlington did not heed her. "Yes—I mean no," was all the answer he offered her as he turned to Claud, sat on the bed, pushed back his hat from his heated forehead, and poured into Claud's attentive ears an account of the play, and another piece of news which was even more exciting.

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The entertainment had proved a great success. Even the foreigners had been amused by the nigger minstrels, and the English of course had been charmed; for we know that they always find in niggers a perennial source of delight. The great comic song—

“I’ve stuck between the railings of the arey,
In trying to kiss cookey on the chin,”

was twice encored. And if the foreigners were especially charmed by “Hard Times” and some of the more serious of the songs, it was probably because they did not understand English sufficiently well to fully appreciate our characteristic forms of humour. The music-hall entertainment also gave unbounded delight—to the English. But here again the foreigners could not follow the delicate turns of wit, the hinted humour, the perfect tact, and the exquisite *finesse* which are characteristic of these entertainments, and which appeal so strongly and render them so irresistible to the English nation, whenever it contrives to witness one of them.

Tottie’s song, for instance, was such a tremend-

ous success, that the author cannot resist the temptation of quoting its chorus. He came on dressed as "a music-hall young lady," in pink silk stockings, short skirts, a painted face, and a very golden wig; and he sang his song with such gusto and effect, that the author also feels that he really must apologise if in the previous pages of this book he has given the impression that poor little Tottie was hopelessly stupid. If he has done so, he has failed to do Tottie justice, for that young gentleman proved himself to be nothing of the sort when he gave up his mind to imitating "the lady star *artistes*" of that distinguished profession.

And these are the words whose brilliant delivery convinced even the most sceptical that Tottie had brains (of a certain sort), and at times knew how to use them:—

"I'm a mashing, dashing, little gay coquette—get away.
And I smoke the lardy-dardy cigarette—get away.
But I really am so shy,
That I cannot tell you why,
I'm your own rummy, nummy, crummy pet—get away."

He sniggled, he ogled, he tittered, he winked,

he danced, and he sang. All his friends were in raptures. "He's the most amusing chap I ever met" was the general verdict, although it must be admitted there were some (for we know there are always jealous natures who hate that another should be nobler or better or more successful than themselves) who said, "Little ass! He makes one sick. Why doesn't somebody kick him?"

When Tottie's *encores* were finally over, and he had gathered up his last bouquet, there came a piano sketch, which was given by a gentleman, "in the style of Corney Grain." It only recalled the faintest recollections of the great original, although it was not only given in his style, but was even given—as far as possible—in his own music, his songs, and his language.

This was followed by an operetta in French, and the whole entertainment wound up with the little comedietta which was played by Miss van Knut and Darlington.

Darlington was very nervous, but he got through the opening all right, when he has to come downstairs and find that the family prayers have begun. Then Lucy entered, and the conversational *badinage*

began in grim earnest, until they neared the fatal passage.

“Is it yes or no?” whispered Darlington, suddenly; but Miss van Knut took no notice, and went on with her part.

“Now will you marry me?” said Darlington suddenly, in what was intended to be a whisper, but which had an intensity and emphasis in it that would probably carry it farther than was desired.

Lucy at this point was supposed to be sobbing. “You don’t consider my feelings, it seems,” she sobbed; then she suddenly turned her head towards him and whispered, “Yes; go on with your part.” But if she expected that he would go on with his part, she was woefully mistaken. He caught at her hand. “You’re a brick!” he said, with a triumphant air of delight. Then he suddenly recalled the situation. He had forgotten every word, and blushing turned to the prompter.

“You shall not miss——” said the voice of that indispensable functionary.

“Oh yes—of course. You shall not miss them while I am by. You shall listen to mine—for I

love you," he said in one burst, and went down on his knees with a thump which made every one titter.

Miss van Knut gave out her next speech with the utmost coolness and deliberation—she even put in a piece of *impromptu* by-play, and suddenly chucked her young lover under the chin.

He had recovered himself by this time, so with an air of portentous gravity he rose up, and taking her face between his hands, he began the famous speech in his most tragical tones.

"O child, child!" he began; but whether his sense of the ludicrous overmastered him, or whether the demureness of Miss van Knut's expression was too irresistible, or whether the excitement of happiness had taken away his nerve,—he never himself knew, but he suddenly burst out laughing, and dropped her face as though it had been a hot plate that he was handling. She only controlled her expression a moment longer than he did.

"You are really too funny for anything," she said through her laughter, regaining her presence of mind sufficiently to throw open the door in

the background. "We also have been at family prayers," she went on. "Doesn't he look like it?" she suddenly added as the curtain fell.

Although the audience could not be certain how much was *impromptu* and how much was in the play, they knew by instinct that it was not all acting, and that some crisis must have taken place in the relationship of these two young people to each other. The conclusion of the play became the event of the evening, and gave a universal topic for conversation. Lady Downstreamdown swept round behind the scenes and commanded Darlington to appear before her. When he did appear she carried him off to her rooms, and what happened during the subsequent interview never transpired. At the end of an hour Miss van Knut was sent for, and was received extremely graciously.

"So after all you were only testing his constancy?" said the Countess, kissing her.

"Oh dear, no; I was testing my own," answered Miss van Knut. "Lord Darlington has the most lovely character," she added.

"He's only a boy," suggested his mother.

"I guess I like a nice boy better than a one-

horse man." Then she suddenly seized the Countess's hand and said, "You are not angry with us, are you? I hope I shall make him a good wife. Ah, but how hard I shall try!"

"My dear," said the Countess, her dignity gradually thawing into geniality, "I am sure you will succeed. And I think that Darlington could not have shown his good sense better than by choosing you."

"And I may come to England and canvass for him? I am longing to canvass—it must be real fun; and you know we Americans canvass quite too beautifully when we set about it."

"Of course," said the Countess. "I hope you will come and stay with us at once. We shall be starting to-morrow, I think. Darlington has to see about his election, and I am sure this place is most unhealthy. They have had several cases of typhoid, I hear, besides poor Mr Brownlow. So sad, I think, a young man struck down like that, and not at all likely to recover, they say."

"Not recover!" exclaimed Miss van Knut in a tone of distress, and she turned to Darlington, who at this moment sauntered into the room and asserted

his new possession by putting his arm round her waist.

"Is Mr Brownlow really dangerously ill?" she asked.

"Not a bit," answered Darlington, in his easy way. "Old Claud will pull through all right,—why, he's standing for Parliament!"

"It's too funny to think of you in Parliament, darling—ton," said Miss van Knut, in that voice which unconsciously marks the change from a sad subject concerning some one else, to a delightful one with which we ourselves are occupied. "And I'm coming to canvass for you—it will be too lovely!"

"Quite too lovely," said Darlington, kissing her. And they separated for the night.

As the days went on, Pompeii became almost deserted. The English season had taken most of the English home, and many of the foreigners had left in consequence of the spread of the fever. There had been a good many cases during the last fortnight, and it had been discovered that poor Pompeii was practically undrained. The long deserted streets, with their brightly painted little houses,

could not help looking in the burning sunshine as though they formed the pathetic framework of some dumb forgotten city of other days. The white dust lay along their pavements. The Forum stood in all its graceful beauty: it was neglected and silent. Its very loneliness made a mute appeal for some returning life—some sound of voices or movement of people—to break the stillness. Mrs Leo had recovered, and she and her husband had gone to Sienna. Lady Downstreamdown and Darlington had returned to England for the election, and the Van Knuts had gone with them. Mr Smythe had returned to godfather the various London dances. Tottie had flown. The very word fever was enough to send him flying; for he would at any time have left his dearest friend to die anywhere, deserted and alone, rather than stay near anything that he imagined might be infectious. Even Miss Rattletubs had departed. She had had a great loss. All her letters to her brother, which had been especially written with a view to subsequent publication, had been lost, and she was hurrying home to try to see if they could not be found again. She also intended to speak in favour of Home Rule at some of the

meetings. "Of course we must abolish the Union—I've always said so," she told her friends. "I've always said that it was the Union which produced the Irish famine, and the Fenians, and the Land League, and all their troubles. If we can only abolish it, I feel certain that Ireland will be as contented and happy and prosperous as it was before they were crushed down by that infamous act of oppression. Besides, the dear Prime Minister wishes it—and that's enough for me; because how could he possibly wish it if it wasn't right? We are going to rule them by love instead of by law for the future: it will make a splendid beginning, for that is what I am looking forward to—the whole world governed by love,—no kings, no armies, no policemen even, nothing but the sense of unselfish justice which will be all-powerful." Which sentiments show that Miss Rattletubs had not been corrupted by Pompeii, but retained her sturdy common-sense and her independence of judgment through every danger that might surround her.

All our friends had gone: the languid and beautiful Bertie had joined his regiment at Windsor; Redburn had left to arrange his show at Dowdes-

wells before going out with his yeomanry; Lady Marlowe was fighting the battle of the Constitution with Primrose teas in the country,—only Mrs Denbigh and Claudia remained to nurse poor Claud.

Day after day passed on, and the fever ran its course. He generally dozed for about twenty-four hours after his doses of quinine, and then woke up only to find that the time for his ice-baths had arrived.

He grew gradually weaker, and Lord St Kevan was sent for. He was almost too ill to be read to now. He lay for hours with Claudia sitting by his side; his hand rested in hers, and in spite of his weakness, a deep unspoken happiness gave his mind leisure for repose. He felt devoid of all anxiety or even curiosity about the future. His body was so strangely inert—so uncontrollable by any wish of his—that he sometimes felt inclined to wonder if it were really his own. And his mind shared to a certain extent in the strange experience.

So the slow hot days passed on, till one morning a letter came—a letter whose very envelope made Claudia's eyes dance with a sudden brightness.

"Look here!" she said, holding it out at arm's length. "Claud, look at the address!"

He did so, and caught for a moment her smile and her look of hot delighted excitement as he read, "Claud Brownlow, Esq., M.P."

"Claud Brownlow, M.P.," he repeated slowly, but the smile had died away out of his eyes and lips. "Please put it," he said, "somewhere where I can see it." It was pinned to the foot of the bed. He looked at it for a long time without speaking. Then he said suddenly, "It is so exciting—the first time,"—he turned his head and looked into his darling's eyes before he added,—“and perhaps the last time too.”

"The last time, Claud!"

"Yes; for they will require to have another election."

CHAPTER XXIII.

LORD ST KEVAN arrived the morning after his letter. He was in great distress at his nephew's illness; Claud had always lain very near his heart. He had always loved him with a love which was almost paternal in its tenderness; he had thought of him first; he had looked on him as his personal heir, although, of course, all the real property went to his elder nephew.

He had watched him growing from childhood, and had tried to enter into all his interests and sympathise with all his boyish troubles. If of late some clouds had gathered between them, they had since departed, having taught both, the uncle hoped, a lesson of forgiveness for unintentioned errors, and given them for the future a new experience of mutual sympathy, of charity, and of forbearance.

And now, when the consummation of all his fondest hopes had been crowned by Claud's election, the blow had suddenly fallen; every plan which he had formed lay shattered; the nephew whom he loved so dearly was very ill, it might be dying. As he lay there, so weak, so quiet, so pathetically content, his poor head resting on the rumpled pillow, the smile of welcome lingering so wistfully on his boyish face, his uncle suddenly realised what it would cost him if this young life were taken; and all the troubles of later years seemed in a moment to be visible as an encircling web, woven by the mysterious Fates into an inauspicious garment of inevitable doom.

He stood for a second silent, thinking of another bedside, when his younger brother, Claud's father, had pressed his hand for the last time, and smiled at him so lovingly with the same eyes that were smiling at him now. Then he said gently—

“My poor boy, it is terrible to see you like this. We must try to get you well as soon as possible. We owe it to the country, for you are a public character now, you know.”

“You are too good; I can never thank you. I

am so sorry you should have had the bother of coming all this way for me," said Claud.

He was very weak, and he spoke with difficulty; but this was one of the days when he had not to take quinine, and his mind was clear although his voice was low. He turned his head and looked at both Claudia and his uncle with a sudden flush of expectancy.

"My—Claudia," he said, simply.

She was standing on the other side of the bed. Lord St Kevan came up to her, and bending over her, gave her a quiet kiss, with that grand air of mingled paternal and chivalrous courtesy which only comes with a rich inheritance of stainless nature nobly trained.

"My dear, will you accept an old man's blessing?" he said, taking her hand very kindly; "believe me, it is the best gift he has to offer. In spite of his illness, Claud ought to be one of the happiest men living," he added, gallantly.

"I am—I am," said Claud.

"If anything can atone for my delay in offering my congratulations to my nephew, it must be the warmth with which I offer them, now

that I have the pleasure of knowing the young lady."

He gave the quaint, ceremonious little sentences with his charming old-world grace of bearing, and Claudia thought him the most distinguished type of perfect courtliness that she had ever seen.

She felt confused as she tried to thank him for his kindness—to express her earnest hope that she might succeed in being the best of wives to the best of men.

"You must stop her mouth, uncle, when she talks like that," Claud said, before he asked eagerly if Darlington had been elected. When he heard that not only Darlington had been elected, but that Flashington had been defeated, he could have cheered with delight, and felt that comfortable sense of satisfaction which follows any great relief take complete possession of him.

Lord St Kevan sat down, and drawing a local newspaper from his pocket, offered to read them Darlington's speech. They were naturally delighted. Claud had long had a great curiosity to know what Darlington would say when fate should bring him face to face with a confronting meeting,

and he should find himself at last really compelled to make a speech—or something that would pass for one.

“First of all, I must read you a letter which the Prime Minister has been kind enough to honour his opponent with,” Lord St Kevan said, softly. “It is a very characteristic one. Here it is.” He found the paragraph, and began—

“DEAR SIR,—Having spent some days during my childhood in your neighbourhood, I trust I shall not be accused of attempting to unduly influence your election if I write to tell you what an especial and peculiar interest I take in your contest.

“As all right, all justice, and all expediency are on your side, while your opponent (who, I much regret to see, is standing in support of that infamous Union, which I have so consistently condemned throughout my political career) can only be supported by the narrow prejudice of the educated classes and their dependants, I earnestly trust that you may be successful in your noble battle against privilege and error. I am as certain that we (supported as we are by the convinced and

righteous judgment of the impartial masses) must win in the end, as I am certain that truth and honour, justice, right, and honesty, will finally prevail. When the sons of peers, as I observe with deep regret, not only take part in elections, but even offer themselves as candidates for Parliament, with the purpose of representing the aristocratic orders in the House of Commons, I gravely fear that they strike another blow at the aristocracy and at the constitution of our country. Should they succeed in their endeavours, the doubt will be reluctantly forced upon me whether, at no long time from the present, it may not be necessary to protect the country against their pernicious and encroaching influence."

"Very pretty, I'm sure," said Claud.

"We must make allowances," replied Lord St Kevan. "At any rate, it did Darlington good rather than harm, I believe."

Then he turned to the paper and read them Darlington's speech. It was so much more conventional than could possibly have been expected, that they all decided that either the newspaper

must have somewhat rearranged it for their readers, or that Darlington's papa had had a hand in its composition. Claudia inquired if he was not asked any questions. Lord St Kevan at this suggestion looked on a little, and found the report of some interrogations at the bottom of the column. "He is asked what are his views with regard to local government, and this is his answer," he said—"Any scheme for enlarging the representative principle in local self-government will receive my most careful consideration, and should it prove to be sufficiently comprehensive, I shall hope to accord it my warmest support.'"

Claud laughed aloud. It was the first time he had laughed since his illness. "Fancy poor old Darlington actually saying that! How I should like to have seen his face when he read it off a slip of paper!"

"Hush, Claud! you mustn't talk so much, you will make yourself worse," said Claudia, in a warning voice.

"Yes, yes, of course; how inconsiderate I am!" added Lord St Kevan hastily, recollecting that they were in charge of their invalid, and were responsible for his being kept perfectly quiet. "You

must listen, my boy, while we talk. Let me tell you about Cade. He has behaved splendidly—splendidly. 'Pon my soul, I didn't know he had it in him. He and Grimley and Featherstonhaw, and the others, have fought for the principles of their party and the integrity of the empire like Crusaders. I'm almost sorry I left them all—I am indeed." A glow of enthusiasm shone in the old man's eyes, and his companions felt the appealing tremble of indignant sympathy ring through his gentle expressive voice.

"Of course Grimley is in?"

"Grimley has been defeated by the caucus—the *Liberal caucus*." The tone in which he pronounced these words lit them up with a scorn which revealed his imprisoned feelings. "They hate him—oh, how they hate him! Nothing is so abhorrent to a Liberal caucus as a genuinely consistent and fearless Liberal. To their hatred of his Liberalism they add their fear of his independence, until their hate not only becomes personal, but is so poisoned with spite that it relentlessly pursues its victim with every shabby misrepresentation that mean malignancy can think of."

“ I know,” said Claud, a little wearily. Then, as his thoughts went back to Darlington, he said, “ I don’t see how the dear boy’s going to bag his Buckhounds after all.”

“ The Buckhounds ? ” asked Lord St Kevan. He was always on the alert when anything was mentioned suggesting the solemn and important subject of the Household appointments.

“ He thought his people would probably get it from the next Liberal Government,” interposed Claudia.

“ Extremely unlikely — extremely unlikely,” broke in Lord St Kevan warmly. And he went on to give a list of reasons which, in his opinion, made it extremely improbable that Lord Downstream-down would have the appointment offered to him. As we have seen before, his idea of the principle of party government meant government by one set of families (specially trained and tempered), alternating with government by a precisely similar set of other families. A good Government meant a strong and capable Executive, for he regarded the legislative functions of a Government more or less in the light of a necessary evil, to be evaded and ignored as much as possible. And therefore he had been

accustomed to look upon the Household appointments as of the utmost importance to the well-being of the State, and was always a little shocked if he heard expectations lightly expressed on grounds which were insufficient, that this or that person would manage to get a particular post when the other party came into power.

At last Claudia, as the responsible nurse, felt compelled to hint in the gentlest manner that she thought Claud had had enough excitement for one day. Lord St Kevan was seized with remorse. He pressed Claud's hand; he forbade him to speak another word. Then adding that he knew his departure was really the kindest to both, he left them—the patient settling to sleep, and his young girl-guardian sitting so quietly at his side, watching for any sign that might tell of change, waiting to gratify even his lightest wish, and praying with steadfast faith that he might be restored to health once more, as only a good and loving woman can wait and watch and pray.

Claudia all this time had borne up bravely. She had alike resisted despondency and the growing fatigue which comes with continuous nursing in

a sick-room. The nurse, it is true, sat up with Claud during each night, but Claudia was almost his sole companion through every long uneventful day. She believed—in her heart she felt sure—that he would recover. She never allowed her mind for an instant to dwell on the awful alternative. In the solemn battle that life and death were waging over her darling, she felt that her passionate love, her earnest prayers, must avail him somewhat, must constrain kindly nature to give back his life to them both for a little longer. But the strain was telling upon her. To sit, and watch, and listen, and wonder, and think, hour after hour, while the shadow that fell from the edge of the blind and passed over the wall, when the sun was shining, became in her fancy a sundial, hung there as the only record that time was still passing—gave her at times a dream-like feeling that some other world had claimed them, and that their lives must have passed away to a land of the might-have-been.

The doctor had ordered that Claud should be kept as quiet as possible, and Mrs Denbigh had been the only visitor admitted into the sick-room.

Even her visits were brief. To Claud they appeared like a gracious vision, a few kind words, a kiss, and a gentle rustle of softly retreating skirts. He had not, however, been all the time lying in the half-conscious state which generally followed the doses of medicine they were compelled to give him. Sometimes he woke up quite himself, and then he and Claudia talked in that casual discursive way which is pleasant when one is ill and the mind wanders lightly from subject to subject, touching on each and dropping it for another with the wilful restless lassitude fever so often produces. They discussed their favourite books, and people, and fancies, and hopes, and ideals.

"Putting aside the great unapproachable masters," Claud said one day, "Chopin, and Keats, and Fred Walker remain my own particular favourites. One seems to have a kind of personal fondness and tenderness for them, such as one only feels for one's intimate friends."

"You mustn't let Mrs Leo hear you talking like that. By the way, she has quite recovered from her attack of fever. Well, I was chatting with her the other day, and we happened to touch upon

‘Lohengrin.’ ‘Parts of it are so lovely, but other parts are so tedious,’ I remarked. ‘Ah,’ she said, ‘you feel that, do you? so do I. Some parts of it are so hideous and so tedious, they are almost commonplace enough to have been written by one of the Italians themselves; but the opera is saved by the great duet.’ ‘Yes,’ I replied, ‘Elsa and Lohengrin sitting together while the twilight——’ ‘You don’t mean to say that you call *that* the great duet,’ she cried; ‘why, that’s the most wretched, insipid, incomprehensible thing in the whole opera. Of course *the* great duet is that exquisite masterpiece which Ortruda and Telramondo sing in the second act.’”

“She seems quite up to her old form. She must have got well very quickly.”

“She has; they left for Sienna yesterday.”

Claud seemed so much better the day after Lord St Kevan’s visit, that when Darlington reached Pompeii, having left home the moment his own election was over, the doctor decided that they might see each other.

Darlington, warned and drilled by advice, came into the room on tiptoe.

"Poor old chap," he said, in a voice that was hushed with concern, "you look awfully bad. I have come to fetch you home as soon as you're well enough."

"Ah, dear boy, you were always ready to fag for me—weren't you? But we mustn't be inconsiderate, keeping you here away from your Parliamentary duties," said Claud, with almost pathetic playfulness.

"You mustn't make Claud talk, Lord Darlington," said Claudia, warningly. "You know I'm a sort of tyrant set over him to keep him quiet."

"I'll do all the talking," answered Darlington, sitting down and beginning already to feel more at home in the sick-room, and more reassured as to Claud's recovery. "Isn't it fun to think of our both being in Parliament together; and sitting on opposite sides of the House too! Why, we shall be able to wink at each other over the front benches."

"Aren't you going to sit below the gangway?" asked Claud, mischievously.

"Below the gangway! certainly not," answered Darlington stoutly, though it must be admitted

that he had but the faintest idea what kind of members are accustomed to occupy that position.

"I just looked into Redburn's show as I went through town," he continued. "The private view—such a squash, one couldn't even get into the room. All the smart people in town were there. The pictures are all what Redburn calls 'pictorial moments.' A good deal more moment than picture about them, I think. The old Johnnie's better at polo than painting, after all—though he tells me that plenty of people buy his things."

"Perhaps that is because he *is* good at polo," said Claudia, shrewdly.

"I said to him, 'Well, I suppose you've got all that is most eminent in art and literature here this afternoon?' And what do you think he said? Well, he said, 'All that is most eminent in art and literature! My dear chap, I hope I haven't fallen quite so low as that.'"

"He really reminds one of Mr Phœbus in 'Lothair,'" said Claudia.

"Of course he was only joking," said Darlington.

"And how is Miss van Knut?" asked Claud.

"Eliza? oh, she's awfully fit," answered Darling-

ton, with the easy air of a proprietor. "She was thundering good at canvassing, I can tell you. She wants me to go to America for a visit. She says that they all have a perfectly lovely time there. Even the murderers have a lovely time,—they sit in prison receiving calls from ladies, and bouquets, and flowers; and they're interviewed, and every word that they say comes out in the papers. She says you feel just important enough to be an archbishop. She has made a great success in London; and she's wild with delight because she has been asked to the ball at Marlborough House."

The stream of talk would have flowed on for ever, had not Lord St Kevan's entrance brought it to a conclusion. He came in to pay Claud a little visit, and Darlington rose when he entered. The two chatted together about the elections. Lord St Kevan "availed himself of the opportunity," as he expressed it, to offer Darlington his congratulations on his successful contest.

"It gave me particular satisfaction to hear that you were in. We want to see a great many more young fellows like you in the House," he said, in perfect good faith and without the least tinge of

satire. "The Commons are the best training for the Lords, after all. And in the House, as it is, Giles's gang are already a great deal too numerous."

"What is he up to now?" asked Darlington.

"The last thing I heard of Giles," Lord St Kevan replied, "was his answer to a remonstrance which somebody made when he proposed some new legislation which might come in conflict with one of the Ten Commandments. His reply was as follows: 'We must remember that they're only "paper commandments," after all, and will have to adapt themselves sooner or later, like everything else, to the wishes of the majority.' " And the tone of his lordship's voice could leave no one in doubt as to his lordship's opinion of both the words and the speaker.

"He a little overdoes it," put in Claud; "he comes dangerously near burlesquing his Master.

"They say he hopes for a baronetcy," Darlington went on.

"A baronetcy! he hope for a baronetcy!" gasped Lord St Kevan, in a voice so compressed, so intense, so portentous, that it showed by its note it

was only consideration for Claud which prevented its being an outburst of thunder. "Oh, of course that report is a mere *canard*. A man's hopes, as we find, are unbounded; but, after all, the fellow can't be a perfect fool, and he must know that he is about as likely to be made a baronet as I am to be made—to be made Emperor of China."

The old man's unpractical, old-fashioned, feudal ideas as to the suitability of the recipient selected for the bestowal of honours, must be excused by remembering that this story is almost a fairy tale, and that in reality nothing could be more probable than that a man in Mr Giles's position should be rewarded by such a promise. Our only thought should be one of pride at his moderation in not demanding a peerage as a recompense for his arduous services on behalf of the State.

CHAPTER XXIV.

As the days passed by and triumphant summer began to assert itself, Claud gradually grew weaker. There was no longer any chatter in the hushed and darkened bedroom. Politics were not mentioned, jokes were unmade. When Lord St Kevan or Darlington came to see him, they only stayed a little while, murmuring those broken commonplaces of affection which strive so piteously to give tongue to a man's silent and reticent sympathy,—which seem so insufficient to the speaker, and yet come so soothingly to the young sufferer, after all.

Claud was now often almost unconscious for days together. His life was made up of far-away visions of earliest childhood. They recurred with a vividness lent by realisation. He dreamt of those almost forgotten days when loving arms carried him, hush-

ing him gently into his evening sleep; when he looked for a mother's smile to reward him for trying to do his best; when his first pony, galloping up the turf, thrilled him with a delight which was all the stronger because of the throb of terror which caught his breath as they started.

He sat once more in the high square pew of the grey parish church, pervaded still with the faint sense of drowsy contentment he knew so well in the old days. The quiet Sunday morning passed on as it used to pass, so gently, so lingeringly, that he felt he might soon have dropped asleep, if the hymns had not come at intervals, to demand his attention; for, with boyish energy, he always had given the whole of his little heart and voice to the singing. He gazed once again at the cherubs' heads flanking the quaint memorial tablets along the walls. They still had the air of brooding mystery which had helped the boy to spin those unnumbered self-told histories that make up the dumb yet dearest romances of childhood.

Next he found himself scampering over the pleasant country-side to drink tea with old Mrs Briggs, the keeper's wife, whose rose-covered cottage stood

on the edge of the park, where the young winds came so softly, bringing the scent of the clover-fields into the snug little parlour. Unnumbered lumps of sugar had made his tea the sweetest, the most delicious, that he had ever tasted. The thin bread-and-butter; the strawberries, when the warmth had ripened them fully; the curds and cream; the milk-jug shaped like a cow, which lifted up by its tail and poured milk from its open mouth; the absence of any guardian power whose restraining selection might tend to curtail his generous choice; old Mrs Briggs's creeping stories even, which were all the more ghastly because they were "perfectly true," and which told of death-watches, of fatal inherited curses, of haunted houses, of horrid ghouls which feast on the festering limbs of the dead, and shadowy shuddering ghosts that at times would titter and scream, at times would "mutter and peep,"—these various joys all tended to give to the little festival a peculiar enchantment.

In his dreams he passed through many other events of his boyish daytime, until at last he found himself safely tucked up once more in his own little bed, the cosy particular bed of his childhood. He

lay quite quietly, having that happy sense of tranquil wakefulness children often feel when their bedtime has come, before they are ready to leave the bright day hand in hand with sleep. The room had always been called his, from days which ran back beyond memory. The last stain of sunset was fading across the familiar ceiling. The wall-paper pattern, whose angles he counted so often, was mingling and blending with the gathering twilight. The warm dusk was filled with the scent of the dropping laburnum and lilac blossoms. Even the last tired twitter of birds had ceased. The day was passing so quietly into the hush of the summer night, coming at length, imperceptibly and reluctantly, to give rest to all toiling life. And the boy caught the hum of a tardy belated bee going home to his hive, and heard the clustering roses rustle against the open casement. The lurking shadows had weaved themselves into an uprising veil of darkness; but the luminous sky was still bright through the window, and friendly stars peeped out one by one to keep the boy company.

His head had turned at last to nestle into the

pillow. His eyes were just capitulating to slumber, when a light tread broke on the stillness. A mother's caressing hand smoothed the bedclothes. Once more a mother's kiss touched his forehead. And he saw through his lashes the diamond rings sparkling upon the fingers that shaded the candle so carefully.

"Good night, my son," said that voice he had known he should never hear again.

"Oh, mother, mother," he cried, with a sudden yearning passion, "don't leave me; stay with me always." He stretched out his craving arms, and awoke, as he caught with startled despair at the emptiness.

Darlington sat by his side. The hot sun was shining. The medicine bottles and cooling drinks on the table stood up there grimly—a silent row of inevitable reminders.

"You've been unconscious, but now you feel better; don't you, old man?" said Darlington, kindly.

"I've been dreaming—dreaming I was a child again. Life is sweet after all," he added, half to himself.

He was thirsty, and Darlington got him an iced drink. Then he settled down to hear some of the passing events of the last few days. When Claud heard that the Liberals had gone out and the Conservatives come in, he suddenly gave one look of exultant triumph.

"I always have thought that the flight to Varennes and the death of Gordon are the two most heartbreaking events in all modern history," he said, as though his mind had already passed on to another interest. "The flight to Varennes failed through adverse fate; but Gordon was simply entrapped, deserted, sacrificed, to suit the convenience of him who has now at last been defeated. Heaven often lets men escape justice in this world, but such betrayals are always punished sooner or later."

Poor Claud's mind had frequently been wandering lately; it must have been wandering now. Darlington wisely did not notice his wild unmeaning words; it was better to pass them by unanswered.

When the doctor came in the evening, he still gave them hope, but only the slightest. They sat in the room, not talking much, simply letting the time pass on—the minutes pass into hours, and

the hours pass into the night—while they waited for any change that might come to their suffering charge.

A faint sweet voice was heard singing far, far away in the dim distance. Claud had not spoken for hours; now he suddenly said, "I was always theatrical: fancy if I were to die to slow music after all!"

"But, darling, you mustn't talk like that," Claudia whispered.

"The doctor says you may soon be better," added Lord St Kevan.

"If I do not—do not get better," Claud went on, "I should like my grave covered with roses. On the tombstone, Thanatos, the angel of death, standing with an inverted torch; and just the one text, 'Underneath are the everlasting arms.'" He seemed for a moment troubled. "I know there is something else," he said. Then he remembered—"I must have a cherub with wings, like the one in the old church at home."

Lord St Kevan promised. The silence was broken by Claud, who suddenly asked them to read him "Jackanapes." The book was fetched, and

Claudia began that most touching of all little stories — the most tenderly perfect tale of a brave young life that has ever been given to childhood.

She read to the end, though her voice at times sank to a trembling whisper.

“Any life would have been worth living, if one could have died for a friend—like that,” murmured Claud, pressing her dear hand to give her his silent thanks.

As he lay with his eyes closed, he hummed to himself the wistful air in ‘Aïda,’ which wails so mournfully through the last sad scene of constancy and death. He felt himself floating slowly through endless space, weightless and helpless. The warm hand still clasping his, seemed the only link that retained him to this world’s brink. He gradually sank to a state between waking and sleeping. For him all time had ceased to be. But the long hours of darkness grew endless to Claudia as she sat on and on. The night-light threw up gigantic shadows across the ceiling. They danced in weird mockery to its flickering. Every two hours she rose to assist the nurse in giving him medicine. She lifted him

up in her arms, while the nurse held the cup to his lips; and this was the only event which told her their vigil must end at last. She choked back the sobs which rose at the thought that perhaps this might be the last night she should ever be able to watch by her lover on earth. A dumb sense of instinctive despair clouded over her. Her feelings broke into consciousness with an almost inaudible moan of hopelessness. Would she never again hear the voice that had woke her answering love—never again see the bright face that used to look down on her with its smile of welcome, before it stooped for a kiss? There are griefs too great to realise perfectly. They are known, and felt, and borne with a surrendering helplessness which is almost a resignation.

As the grey dawn broke on the darkness, Claud stirred a little. Lord St Kevan and Darlington came in softly. They had been resting in a neighbouring room. The only sound was a whispered question, a hushed reply.

The coming day flushed across the sky in dissolving bars of gold. The room was alight with its herald radiance. It called on the world to wake,

and seemed for a moment to summon Claud back from the shores of the other world.

He opened his eyes, and they fell upon Darlington. "Dear old chap," he whispered. "Good-bye—we shall never have any fun in the Commons after all."

He looked towards Claudia. She stood at his side and bravely smiled. He smiled back at her in return—the last, the sweetest smile she had ever known. "So soon," he whispered. "I am only sorry for your sake, darling. It won't be long. Try not to mind too much." His beautiful eyes brimmed full of a sudden delight. They looked into regions where even love cannot follow. "Mother," he said—"mother, I am coming to you at last." And before their radiance had wholly faded for ever, he had already passed beyond the dim river which bounds each life from the land that knows no to-morrow.

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Pompeii has ceased to be. Its expenses were found to be too great to "keep it up"; its unhealthiness (caused by its want of adequate drainage) produced a panic through all Society, and

frightened the coy spirit Fashion away for ever. Mr Smythe had already turned his attention to an attempt to start a club in London on the same lines as that of the Merlitons in Paris. As Pompeii had only received his patronage, never his cash, he bore its failure with almost heartless equanimity.

It was next converted into a grand casino—a kind of idealised tea-garden; but even in this guise its failure became complete. Then other careers were tried in vain, until at last it was given up—it was wholly abandoned, and left for the siren wind and sunshine to softly caress away into the shadowy places of reminiscence. A pathetic air of desertion appropriated the lonely place. The dumb streets and bright open places silently crumbled. The neglected rooms stood on stolidly, filling up, as time passed, with the beams and plaster and wood-work that dropped from the slowly decaying ceilings; yet with all this trying to bear up bravely, each one as long as it could, before it joined the littering dust that awaited its final fall. The gentle ruin that nature works so gradually and so tenderly that its encroachments

are only proclaimed by the spreading creepers and delicate flowers she scatters before its footsteps, at last took possession of all things. And the poor ephemeral little city sank back once more into nothingness, and passed away where its only dwelling-place is in memory's quiet keeping.

THE END.

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